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## AFTERTHOUGHTS



*Translated by*  
DOROTHY BUSSY



# Afterthoughts on the U.S.S.R.

by ANDRÉ GIDE



THE DIAL PRESS · NEW YORK

1938



*Printed in Great Britain by*  
L.T.A. ROBINSON, LIMITED,  
THE BOTOLPH PRINTING WORKS,  
LONDON, S.W.9  
*Bound in the U.S.A.*



## I

The publication of my book *Back from the U.S.S.R.* brought me a great many insults. Romain Rolland's gave me pain. I never cared very much for his writings, but at any rate I hold his moral character in high esteem. The cause of my grief was the thought that so few men reach the end of their life before showing the extreme limit of their greatness. I think the author of *Au-dessus de la Mêlée* would pass a severe judgment on the Romain Rolland of his old age. This eagle has made his nest ; he takes his rest in it.

As well as the insulters, there were some sincere critics. I am writing this book to answer them.

Of them all, Paul Nizan, who is usually so intelligent, addresses me the singular reproach of "painting the U.S.S.R. as a world that has ceased to change."

I cannot make out where he gets this. The U.S.S.R. changes from month to month. I said so. That indeed is the very thing that



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alarms me. From month to month the state of the U.S.S.R. gets worse. It diverges more and more from what we had hoped it was—it would be.

\* \* \*

Oh yes ! I admire the steadfastness of your trust, of your love (I do not say it ironically), but nevertheless, comrades, confess that you are beginning to get uneasy ; and you ask yourselves with increasing anxiety (in face of the Moscow trials, for instance), “ To what lengths shall we have to carry our approval ? ” Sooner or later, your eyes will open. They will be obliged to open. Then you will ask yourselves—you, the honest ones—“ How could we have kept them shut so long ? ” \*

As a matter of fact, the best informed of the

\* Oh, how many of these there are already who are beginning to feel the torment of anxiety ; it will grow and grow until at last they will be obliged to recognize their mistake.

“ I am a former militant communist and Soviet official ; I worked for more than three years in the U.S.S.R. at the press, at the propaganda apparatus, in the inspectorate of industrial enterprises, and after a bitter inward struggle, after the most violent conflicts of my life, I have come to the same conclusion as you.” From a letter written to me by A. Rudolf, the author of *Abschied von Soviet Russland*.



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honest ones hardly dispute my assertions. They content themselves with seeking and giving explanations. Yes, explanations which at the same time shall be justifications of a deplorable condition of affairs. For what they want is not only to show how such a condition has been reached (which, in reality, is easy enough to understand), but to prove that it was right to reach it, or at any rate to pass through it on the way to better things ; and that the road that is being followed with one's back turned to socialism and to the ideals of the October revolution, nevertheless leads to communism, that no other road was possible and that, as for me, I know nothing at all about it.

\* \* \*

I was accused in my book of superficial enquiry and hasty judgments. As if what charmed us in the U.S.S.R. was not precisely first appearances ! As if it was not on looking deeper that the worst became visible !

It is in the heart of the fruit that the worm lies hidden. But when I told you that the apple was worm-eaten, you accused me of blindness—or of not liking apples.



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If I had contented myself with admiring, you would not have reproached me with superficiality ; and yet it is then that I should have deserved that reproach.

\* \* \*

Those criticisms of yours, I know them of old ; they are practically the same as those that were raised by my *Travels in the Congo* and my *Return from Lake Chad*. I was told then that :

(1) the abuses I pointed out were exceptional and of no consequence (for it was impossible to deny them) ;

(2) in order to find sufficient reason for admiring the present state of things, it was only necessary to compare it with the preceding—the state before the conquest (I was tempted to say before the revolution) ;

(3) everything I deplored had deep-seated reasons which I had failed to understand—temporary evil for the sake of greater good.

In those days the criticisms, the attacks, the insults all came from the “right” ; and you of the “left” did not think then of alleging my admitted “want of competence,” only too happy as you were to seize upon my assertions the moment they went to support your



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opinions and could be of use to you. And so to-day, you would not have accused me of this "want of competence," if I had had nothing but praise for the U.S.S.R. and declared that everything in it was for the best.

Nevertheless (and this is the only thing that matters) the commissions of enquiry in the Congo later on confirmed all my statements. And so now, the many communications I receive, the reports I read, the accounts of impartial observers ("friends of the U.S.S.R." though they may be, or may have been before going to see for themselves), have come to corroborate my assertions and to strengthen my fears as to the actual state of the U.S.S.R.

\* \* \*

The great weakness of my *Travels in the Congo*, and what made its testimony extremely vulnerable, came from the fact that it was impossible for me to name my informants and so to expose to reprimand people who, trusting to my discretion, had given me information or had enabled me to consult documents which, as a rule, are preferably kept private, and which it was not permissible for me to quote.



## II

I have been reproached with having based huge judgments on very slight foundations and with having drawn unconsidered conclusions from incidental observations. The facts which I reported, which I had myself observed, were perhaps true, but they were exceptional and proved nothing.

Of all my observations I only set down the most typical. (I will relate a few others later on.) I thought it useless to choke up my book with reports, figures, statistics ; first of all because I had laid down as a rule to make use of nothing I had not myself seen or heard ; secondly because I haven't much faith in official figures. And above all because these figures and tables (which I have, however, studied) can be found elsewhere.

But since I am pressed, I will give some further details :

Fernand Grenier, Jean Pons and Professor Alessandri travelled, I believe, together ; they had with them one hundred and fifty com-



panions, like themselves "friends of the Soviet Union." No wonder that the evidence of these prosecutors—I am the prosecuted—is identical. The figures they produce to convict me of error are the same—figures which were furnished them and which they accepted without control.

I will try to explain in what way they differ from the figures given by other witnesses who are certainly much better informed by reason of their having long worked in the U.S.S.R. and had time to get below the surface of things, whilst the one hundred and sixty-two companions merely passed through the country. Their tour lasted twenty days in all, fourteen of which were spent in Russia, from the 14th to the 28th August. During this short time they managed to see a great deal, but only what was shown them. Not one of them (of my three prosecutors, I mean) spoke Russian. They will allow me in my turn to consider their statements slightly superficial.

I have already said that as long as I travelled in French Equatorial Africa accompanied by officials, everything seemed to me little short of marvellous. I only began to see things clearly when I left the Governor's car and decided to travel on foot and alone, so as to



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have six months in which to get into direct contact with the natives.

Oh, to be sure ! I too saw in the U.S.S.R. plenty of those model factories, those clubs, those schools, those parks of culture, those children's gardens which filled me with admiration and wonder ; and, like Grenier, Pons or Alessandri, all I wanted was to let myself be charmed, so that in my turn I might charm others. And as it is extremely pleasant to charm and be charmed, I should like my opponents to be convinced that the reasons that make me protest against this charm must be many and strong ; and, in spite of what they say, my protests are not made lightly.

\* \* \*

Jean Pons' good faith is respectable ; his trust is touching\* like all childish things. He

\*At least, when it is not simply grotesque, as when he writes : " In the reception room . . . there are a Minerva, a Jupiter, a Diana. The workmen have made only one alteration—they have added a bronze bust of Lenin.

The juxtaposition of Lenin and Minerva seems incomprehensible. And yet it is there before our eyes. Which proves that communism is the natural, logical, and inevitable culmination of many centuries of human history, the inheritor of the highest and most fraternal culture."



accepts what he is told, as I myself did at first, without examination, without hesitation, without criticism.

In opposition to the figures which he quotes—or which Alessandri and Grenier quote—of the output, for instance, of some factory or other (and I agree they are flabbergasting), I would ask these comrades to meditate certain admissions of the *Pravda* of November 12th, 1936 :

“In the course of the second quarter, out of the total number of motor-car accessories supplied by the factory of Yaroslav (and this is the only number mentioned in the official statistics which are so proudly flourished), 4,000 pieces are registered as unfit for use, and during the third quarter 27,270.”

In the number of December 14th, speaking of the steel furnished by certain factories, the *Pravda* says :

“Whereas in the course of February-March, 4.6 per cent of the metal had to be rejected, in September-October, 16.20 per cent was rejected.”

“Sabotage,” people will say. The recent great trials come as a proof in support of this theory—and vice versa. It is, however, permissible to see in such defective output the



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price paid for an excessive and artificial intensification of production.

The programmes, no doubt, are admirable, but it seems that at the present stage of "culture," a specific output cannot be surpassed except at enormous cost.

In the factory of Izhevsk, during the period comprised between April and August, 416,000 roubles' worth of the output was unfit for use ; but for the single month of November there was as much as 176,000 roubles' worth that was unfit.

The frequency of motor-lorry accidents is due to the overworking of the drivers, but also to the bad quality of the vehicles ; out of 9,992 machines examined in 1936, 1,958 were ruled out as defective. In one of the transport sections, 23 machines out of 24 were unfit to put into circulation ; in another, 44 out of 52. (*Pravda*, August 8th, 1936.)

The Noguinsk factory should have furnished a considerable part of the 50 million gramophone records announced in the programme of 1935—4,000,000 that is—but was only able to supply 1,158,000. But the faulty records amounted to 309,800. (This information comes from the *Pravda*, November 18th, 1936.) In 1936, during the first quarter, the production



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was only 49.9 per cent of the quantity scheduled in the plan ; during the second quarter, 38.8 per cent and only 26 per cent during the third.

If production is progressively decreasing, faulty production, on the other hand, is increasing :

1st quarter	.. ..	156,200 defective items
2nd quarter	.. ..	259,400 defective items
3rd quarter	.. ..	614,000 defective items

As for the fourth quarter, the complete results have not yet been published, but it is to be feared they will be a great deal worse, as for October alone the defective items amount to 607,600. It is easy to imagine in these circumstances what the cost price of each acceptable article comes to.

Of the two million exercise-books supplied to the school-children of Moscow by the manufactory that goes by the name of *Heroes of Labour*, 99 per cent are unfit for use (*Izvestia*, November 4th, 1936). At Rostov, eight million exercise-books had to be thrown away. (*Pravda*, December 12th, 1936.)

Out of 150 chairs sold by a co-operative cartel which makes furniture, 46 broke as soon as sat upon. Out of a supply of 2,345 chairs, 1,300 were unfit for use (*Pravda*, September



23rd, 1936). The same defective workmanship occurs in surgical instruments. Professor Burdenka, a celebrated surgeon in the U.S.S.R. complains particularly of the bad quality of the instruments used in delicate operations ; as for the needles used for surgical stitching, they bend or break in the course of the operation (*Pravda*, November 15th, 1936), etc.

This information, together with much more of the same kind, should make people who applaud more circumspect. But propagandists take very good care not to allude to it.

We must note, however, that delays and faulty workmanship are followed by complaints and sometimes by lawsuits which entail heavy penalties, and if the newspapers draw attention to them, it is with a view to improvement.

Auto-criticism, which is so inadequate as regards questions of theory and principle, is very active as soon as it is a matter of carrying out the official programme. It is from the *Izvestia* (June 3rd, 1936) we learn that in some quarters of Moscow, at that date, there was only one chemist's shop for 65,000 inhabitants ; others have only one for 79,000, and in the whole town there are no more than 102.

In the *Izvestia* of January 15th, 1937, we read:



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“ Since the enactment of the decree against abortion, the number of births in Moscow has reached 10,000 a month, which represents an increase of 65 per cent in comparison with the period before the decree. On the other hand, the increase in the number of beds in maternity homes has only been 13 per cent.”

The children's crèches and nurseries are often marvellous. But, in 1932, according to Sir Walter Citrine's calculations,\* the number of children they could hold was only one in eight. . . . According to the new plans (if they are fully carried out), this proportion will be doubled—that is, the number will be two in eight. This, though insufficient is still an improvement. On the other hand, I am afraid the situation as regards workers' dwellings is getting worse. The proposed plans for new buildings are quite inadequate to the

\* “ . . . there should be 2,200,000 places if every child had been accommodated. There were, however, only 250,000 places, which means that only one child in eight of those eligible was accommodated. What will be the position by 1937 when the number of workers is expected to be 28,000,000? Again, taking the town crèches only, there will be accommodation for 700,000 children, whereas there should be accommodation for 2,800,000, if all are to be catered for. So that there will be room for one child in every four, assuming that the plan is carried out to the full.”

*I Search for Truth in Russia* p. 296 by Sir Walter Citrine.



necessities of the case, considering the growth of the population. Where now there are three to lodge in the same room, there is every chance that soon there will have to be five or six, unless some deadly epidemic arises. Added to which, many of the recent buildings erected for workers' dwellings have been so hastily, or rather, so carelessly built, and with such shoddy materials that there is every prospect of their soon being uninhabitable.

This melancholy question of housing is one of those that most affected Sir Walter Citrine. In the neighbourhood of Baku, notwithstanding all the efforts of the official guides, he visited the dwellings of the men working at the oil-fields. "There I saw some of the sorriest specimens of decrepit dwellings I had seen in this country, where they are so plentiful." "The whole place looked vile." In vain the guide endeavoured to persuade him that this is what the millionaires had left behind them. Citrine protested: "The millionaires are not operating the oilfields now . . . Eighteen years after the Revolution you are still allowing your people to live here ! . . . But it is awful to think of hundreds of thousands of people being left in these slums for eighteen years." (*I Search for Truth in Russia*, p. 263.)



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M. Yvon in his pamphlet *Ce qu'est devenue la Révolution Russe* gives further examples of the lamentable shortage of housing and adds :  
“ The cause of this shortage is that the revolution was far more concerned in ‘ outdoing capitalism ’ by building giant factories, and in organizing men for the purposes of production, than in the welfare of the workers. Seen from a distance, this may appear grandiose . . . near at hand it’s damned painful.”



### III

One of the criticisms most justly deserved by *Back from the U.S.S.R.* was that of appearing to attach too much importance to intellectual questions, which we must consent to relegate to the background as long as other more urgent problems remain unsolved. The fact is that I thought it necessary to reproduce the few speeches which I had made when I first arrived and about which there had been some dispute. In so small a book these speeches took up too much room and were too prominent. They date, moreover, from the beginning of my tour. At that time I still believed—yes, I was still simple enough to believe—that it was possible to speak seriously of culture in the U.S.S.R., and to discuss things sincerely. At that time I did not yet know how far the social question had dropped behind, how completely it had been held up.

Nevertheless, I must protest when people see in what I said nothing but the demands and claims of a man of letters. It was of more



than that that I was thinking when I spoke of intellectual liberty. Science, too, compromising itself by complaisant submission.

Such and such a well-known man of science is obliged to repudiate the theory he was professing because it is not sufficiently orthodox. Such and such a member of the Academy of Sciences recants his "former errors" which "might be made use of by fascism," as he himself declares in public. (*Izvestia*, December 28th, 1936.) He is forced to acknowledge as just the accusations made—by order—in the *Izvestia*, which scents in his researches the unpleasant odour of "counter-revolutionary delirium." (See Appendix, p. 127.)

Eisenstein's work is stopped. He is obliged to acknowledge his errors, confess that he was mistaken, and that the new film he has been working at for the last two years, and on which two million roubles have already been spent, does not fulfil doctrinal requirements, so that it has been rightly banned.

And justice? Can it be thought that the last Moscow and Novosibirsk trials are going to make me regret having written the sentence which makes you so indignant?

"I doubt whether in any other country in the world, even in Hitler's Germany, thought



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be less free, more bowed down, more fearful (terrorized), more vassalized.”

\* \* \*

Then—for it wouldn't do to give in too quickly—the “results already obtained” are pertinaciously insisted on : no more unemployment, no more prostitution, women's equality with men attained, human dignity reconquered, education universally spread. But upon examination each one of these fine results is seen to be crumbling away.

I will only speak in detail here of the problem of education ; as for the others, we shall come across them sufficiently in the course of our journey.

It is true that a traveller in the U.S.S.R. meets with numbers of young people who are thirsting for knowledge and culture. Nothing is more moving than their eagerness. And our admiration is demanded at every turn for the facilities put at their disposal. We heartily approve the government's decree which, in February 1936, provided for “the complete liquidation of analphabetism in the course of the year 1936-37 for the four million workers unable to read or write, and for the two million insufficiently able to.” But . . .



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The "liquidation of analphabetism" was already talked of in 1923. The completion of this "historic" liquidation (so it was said) was to coincide with the celebration of the tenth anniversary of October (1927). Now in 1927 Lunacharsky was already talking of "catastrophe." It had only been possible to found fewer than 50,000 elementary schools, while under the old régime there had been 62,000 for a far smaller number of inhabitants.

For, since we are incessantly being told to compare the present state of the U.S.S.R. with that which preceded the Revolution, we are really obliged to take note that in many domains the condition of the suffering classes has far from improved. But let us return to the subject of schools.

Lunacharsky finds (in 1924) that the rural school-teacher's salary is often paid when it is six months overdue, and sometimes not paid at all. The salary is sometimes less than ten roubles a month. (!) It is true that at that time the rouble was worth more. "But," says Krupskaja, Lenin's widow, "the price of bread has risen, and for ten or twelve roubles monthly pay, the school-teacher buys less bread than formerly for four roubles (the amount of his salary up to 1923)."



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In 1927, at the date fixed for the completion of its liquidation, "analphabetism" is still there; and on September 2nd, 1928, the *Pravda* recognises its "stabilisation."

But since then, at any rate, has any progress been made?

We read in the *Izvestia* of November 16th, 1936: "In the first days of the new school year, numbers of schools have already sent us information as to the surprising analphabetism of the school children."

The proportion of unteachable pupils is particularly high in the *new* schools, where it appears to be as much as 75 per cent (still according to the *Izvestia*). In the single town of Moscow, 64,000 pupils were obliged to remain twice the usual time in the same class before being moved up; in Leningrad, 52,000; and 1,500 pupils treble the usual time. At Baku, the number of Russian pupils who failed in their examinations was 20,000 out of 45,000; the number of Turkish 7,000 out of 21,000 (*Bakinski Rabochi*, 15th January, 1937). Moreover, numbers of pupils desert school altogether. "In the course of the three last years, the numbers of *fugitives* reached 80,000 in one of the technical institutions of the R.S.F.S.R. In



the Kabardino-Balkar pedagogical institute the fugitives amounted to 24 per cent, and in that of Chuvachia to 30 per cent." The newspaper adds: "The students of the pedagogical institutes display the most disconcerting analphabetism."

Added to this, these institutes fail to recruit more than 54 per cent of the normal numbers in R.S.F.S.R.; more than 42 per cent in White Russia and more than 40 per cent to 64 per cent in Azerbaijan, etc.

The *Pravda* of December 26th, 1936, informs us that 5,000 children in the region of Gorki do not attend school. And the number of pupils who had deserted school at the end of the first year was 5,984; at the end of the second, 2,362, and at the end of the third, 3,012. Evidently those who persevere are phenomena.

As a counter-stroke to these desertions, one of the directors of the preparatory courses of workers' apprenticeship has had the bright idea of imposing a fine on *fugitives* of 400 roubles a head! (*Pravda Vostoka*, 23rd December). We are not told whether the fine is to be exacted in a single payment; this would seem difficult when the monthly salary of the parent who has to pay is only from 100 to 150 roubles.



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There is a great dearth of school-books. As for those which have to be made use of, they are swarming with errors. The *Pravda* of January 11th, 1937, expresses indignation that the government publishing concerns of Moscow and Leningrad issue impossible manuals. *The Pedagogic Publishing House* prints a map of Europe in which Ireland bathes in the Sea of Aral, and the Hebrides in the Caspian. Saratov has left the shores of the Volga for those of the North Sea, etc.

A multiplication-table is printed on the covers of the school-children's exercise-books. It informs us that  $8 \times 3 = 18$ ;  $7 \times 6 = 78$ ;  $5 \times 9 = 43$ , etc. (*Pravda*, 17th September, 1936.)

And then one understands why accountants in the U.S.S.R. make such constant use of the abacus.

If this much-talked-of, much admired "liquidation of analphabetism" takes so long before being accomplished, it is also because the unfortunate school-teachers, isolated workers as they are, often fail to receive their meagre pay and are obliged to have recourse to quite other occupations than teaching in order to make a living. The *Izvestia* of March 1st, attributes to bureaucratic procrastination



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(or to actual embezzlement) these non-payments, which amount to a state-indebtedness towards teachers of more than half a million roubles for the region of Kuybishev alone. In the region of Kharkov this debt amounts to 72,400 roubles, etc. So that one wonders how the teachers live, and whether the liquidation of the teaching profession will not take place before that of "analphabetism."\*

\* \* \*

I should be sorry to be misunderstood ; I transcribe these cruel figures with regret and feel nothing but unhappiness if they prove me

\* An article in the *Pravda Vostoka* (20th December, 1936) regrets to be obliged to recognize that the plan for the liquidation of analphabetism has not given the hoped for results. Out of 700,000 persons partially or wholly analphabetic, only 30 or 40 per cent have consented to attend classes, "the result of which is that the cost of the liquidation amounts to 800 roubles a head instead of 25 as had been calculated." In one town (Kokand) where perfect liquidation had been counted on before the end of 1936, the number of analphabets had been 8,923 in May ; 9,567 in August ; 11,014 on September 15th and 11,645 on October 1st. (Let us hope that the population increased proportionately through an influx of people from the country ; otherwise we should have to conclude that a number of those who had learnt to read were now unlearning.) The big town of Tashkent counts apparently 60,000 analphabets. But out of 757 persons whose names are entered to attend the classes, only 60 do so. These are the ones tourists admire.



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right. Such a lamentable state of affairs can only be deplored ; but I must protest when your blindness or your bad faith attempts to claim our admiration for such unmistakably wretched results.



#### IV

It was the steepness of your bluff which made the downfall of my confidence, my admiration and my joy so severe and so painful. And what I reproach the U.S.S.R. with is not so much that it has failed to obtain more. (People explain to me now that it could not have obtained more sooner—as I ought to understand ; they argue that it started from far lower down than I can possibly imagine, and that the miserable conditions in which the workers are now stagnating in their thousands are conditions which many of the oppressed classes would have hopelessly longed for under the old régime. But I believe that those who say this are slightly exaggerating.) No ; what I above all reproach the U.S.S.R. with is that they fooled us by representing the situation of their workers as enviable. And I reproach our communists here (oh ! I don't mean the comrades who have been duped, but those who knew, or at any rate who ought to have known better) with having lied to the workers unconsciously or deliberately—and if so, for political reasons.



The Soviet worker is tied to his factory as the agriculture labourer to his sovkhose or his kolkhose, and as Ixion to his wheel. If for any reason, because he hopes to be a little better or a little less ill off elsewhere, he wants to change, let him beware. Regimented, classed, caged, he runs the risk of being refused everywhere. Even if he leaves his factory, without changing his town, he is deprived of the lodging to which his work entitles him (not that he gets it free) and which is extremely difficult to procure. On leaving, he is docked of a large part of his salary if he is a factory worker, and if he is a kolkhosian, he loses all the benefit of his collectivised work. On the other hand, a worker cannot refuse to move when he is ordered to. He is free neither to go nor stay where he pleases, where perhaps he may be drawn or held by love or friendship.\*

\* "Just as the State has sovereign control over the material elements of the economic process, so it has dictatorial control over the human element. The workers are no longer free to sell their labour power where or as they please; they have not the right to move freely in the territory of the U.S.S.R. (interior passports!); the right to strike is suppressed, and any inclination to resist stakhanovite methods exposes them to the severest penalties."

Lucien Laurat: *Coup d'œil sur l'Economie Russe.*  
(*L'Homme Réel*. No. 38, February, 1937).



If he does not belong to the Party, the comrades who do pass over his head. To join the Party, to get oneself admitted (which is by no means easy and demands, over and above special knowledge, perfect orthodoxy and a turn for swift and supple compliance), is the first and indispensable condition for success.

Once in the Party, it is impossible to leave it\* without immediately losing your situation, your place and all the advantages gained by your previous work—without, in fact, exposing yourself to victimisation and universal suspicion. For why leave a Party in which you were so well off?—which procured you such advantages!—and in exchange asked nothing of you but to acquiesce in everything and not to think for yourself? What is all this need of thinking—and for yourself, too—when it is admitted that everything is going so well? To think for oneself is forthwith to become a “counter-revolutionary”—ripe for Siberia.†

An excellent way of getting on is to turn

\* On the other hand, it is very easy to be expelled from it, for the purpose of *purging*. And that means Siberia.

† As Yvon justly says: “To enter the Party is to serve at once the powers that be, your country and your personal interest.” A state of perfect harmony. Happiness depends on it.



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informer. It puts you in the good books of the police ; they then protect you, but at the same time make use of you ; for once you have started, neither honour nor friendship counts. On you must go. For that matter, it is easy to get into the way of it. And the spy is safe.

\* \* \*

When, in France, a party newspaper wishes for political reasons to discredit an opponent, it is to one of this person's enemies that the paper applies to do the dirty job. In the U.S.S.R., it is to his dearest friend. And it is not a request but a demand. The best running down is that which is backed by a friend's desertion. It is important for the friend to dissociate himself from the person it is wished to ruin, and he must give proofs that he does so. (The people to be put up against Zinoviev, Kamenev and Smirnov are their yesterday's comrades—Piatakov and Radek ; they must be dishonoured before in their turn they are shot.) To refuse to give in to this treachery, to this cowardice, is to destroy oneself as well as the friend one wants to save.

One ends by suspecting everything and



everyone. The innocent talk of children may be your ruin. One doesn't dare speak in front of them. Everyone watches everyone else, watches his own words, is himself watched. No more ease, no more free speaking, except perhaps in bed with one's wife, if one is really sure of her. And X . . . amused himself by making out that this was the explanation of marriages having become so frequent. Frequent unions don't by any means give one the same sense of security. Just imagine ! people have been condemned for remarks that had been repeated after an interval of more than ten years. And the longing to pour out one's heart upon one's pillow after this intolerable constraint of every day and all day long becomes continually more and more pressing.

In order to be safe from informers, the most satisfactory way is to be beforehand with them. For that matter, those who have heard ugly-sounding remarks without immediately reporting them are liable to imprisonment or deportation. Spying is one of the civic virtues. One is brought up to it from the earliest age and the child who "tells tales" is complimented.



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To be admitted into that little Paradise—the exemplary town of Bolshevo—it is not enough for a man to be a repentant ex-criminal ; he must also have given away his mates and accomplices. One of the G.P.U.'s means of investigation is this reward offered to informers.

Since the assassination of Kirov, the police have tightened their net still more closely. The presentation of the young men's petition to Emile Verhaeren (at the time of his tour in Russia just before the war), which Vildrac admired so much and of which he gives such a charming account, would certainly not be possible now-a-days ; nor would the revolutionary activities (let us say "counter-revolutionary" if you like) of the Mother and her son in Gorki's very fine book. Where yesterday one found on all sides help, support, protection and connivance, to-day one is spied upon and informed against.

From head to foot of the re-formed social ladder, the most favoured are the most servile, the most cowardly, the most cringing, the basest. All who refuse to stoop are mowed down or deported one after the other. Perhaps



the Red Army\* is rather less exposed. Let us hope so. For soon, of this heroic and admirable people who so well deserved our love, none will be left but executioners, profiteers and victims.

Then, when the Soviet worker is turned into the wretched, hunted creature he becomes as soon as he is no longer among the favoured ones—when he is famished, crushed, ground down, when he no longer dares to raise his voice in protest, or even in lamentation—is it surprising he should re-invent a God and seek relief in prayer? To what human ear can he appeal?

When we read that at the last Christmas services the churches were overflowing, there is nothing there to make us wonder. For the outcast—opium.

I have just discovered—here at Cuverville—

\* I saw a large number of naval people at Sebastopol—officers and ratings. The relationship between the officers and men, and of the men among themselves seemed so cordial, so brotherly, so simple that I could not but be touched. As for the Red Army, I do not remember having seen a single uniform during my whole stay. A story got about in the newspapers that in a big Moscow restaurant, when some officers came in, I saw the whole of the public get up and stand respectfully to attention. This invention was so absurd that I thought it unnecessary to contradict it.



in a corner of the cage in which for the last three months I have been bringing up a wood-pigeon that had fallen out of its nest—I have just discovered that two of the grains of corn with which I feed it—that two of these grains have germinated close to the bird's little drinking-pan, from which a few drops of water sometimes spill over ; and this has provided the necessary moisture for the seeds that have strayed into the narrow chink between the side of the cage and its floor ; they have suddenly (that is, I have suddenly noticed it) each shot forth a thin pale green bayonet which is already about an inch and a half tall. And this—which is nevertheless perfectly natural—has plunged me into such amazement that for a long time I have been able to think of nothing else. Yes ; you count the grains ; you weigh them ; you watch them roll meekly along like little hard, roundish things which can be turned over and upset just as you please. And lo and behold, one of these grains insists on proving that all the same it is a live thing ! To the stupefaction of the administrator who, leaning over the bars of the cage, had let this fact slip his memory.

But there are some Marxist theorists who



seem to me singularly lacking in the sort of humour that will so soften grains that they germinate.\* No doubt this is no place for sentiment. It is improper to have recourse to charity for what should be imposed by justice. To melt into pity over wretchedness, to water it with tears, is to foster it, when what is wanted is to prevent it. (The powder, too, which the Revolution will need must be kept dry.)

What people call the "heart" is destined to "wither away"† as the use for it ceases. Whence a kind of hardness which is rather too easily obtained—a kind of individual impoverishment as the result of, or in view of, an all-round improvement . . . These reflections would lead me too far ; I will keep them for another time.

\* For the whole work of Marx and Engels themselves is dictated by extraordinary generosity of feeling, but still more by an imperious desire for justice.

† I borrow this word from the Marxian vocabulary, as Lenin did when he wrote in *State and Revolution* : "The expression the State withers away is a very happy one, for it expresses both the slowness of the process and its spontaneity." (Lenin : Complete works XXI.)



## V

Monsieur Fernand Grenier quotes with approbation a sentence of mine in *Back from the U.S.S.R.*: "This much at any rate has been definitely gained; the exploitation of the greater number for the benefit of the few no longer exists in the U.S.S.R. This is an immense advance." And Grenier adds to the applause of the audience, "Indeed, comrades, it is immense!"

Indeed, it is immense. It was immense. But it is ceasing to be true. And on this I insist because it is the most important point of all. "The disappearance of capitalism," says Yvon, with great justice, "does not necessarily liberate the worker." It is a good thing that the French proletariat should understand this. Or rather it *would* be a good thing if they *did* understand it. As for the Soviet worker, he is beginning to lose the illusion that he is at last working for himself and regaining his dignity. No doubt there are no more capitalist shareholders to exploit his work. But he is exploited all the same, and in so crafty, so subtle, so crooked a way that he doesn't know whom to blame. It is his



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inadequate wages that permit the inordinately high salaries of other people. It is not he who profits by his labour—by his surplus labour : it is those who are in favour, in good repute, the compliant, the gorged ; and the big monthly salaries of 10,000 roubles and more are made so round by docking the wages of the humble.

To be more precise, I here transcribe the eloquent table drawn up by M. Yvon.\* No one would dare dispute its accuracy.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Highest and lowest monthly salaries</i>	<i>Usual monthly salaries</i>
Workers ...	... from 70 to 400 r.	125 to 200 r.
Small employees ...	... from 80 to 250 r.	130 to 180 r.
Maidservants ...	... from 50 to 60 r., plus, of course, food and lodging.	
Employees and average technicians ...	... from 300 to 800 r.	
Responsible administrators and specialists, high officials, some professors, artists and writers ...	... from 1,500 to 10,000 r. and more ; some monthly salaries are said to amount to from 20,000 to 30,000 roubles.	

The comparative table of pensions is no less eloquent.

Working women : pensions from 25 to 80 roubles a month without any privileges.

Widows of high officials and important specialists : pensions from 250 to 1,000 roubles a month, plus villas or apartments for life, and scholarships for their children and sometimes even for their grandchildren.

\* M. Yvon : *Ce qu'est devenue la Révolution Russe.*



Then follow the deductions—namely 15 per cent to 21 per cent on all salaries, except on those below 150 roubles a month. I cannot quote the entire chapter, but the whole pamphlet should be read.

Five roubles a day and often less. Let this be compared with the wages that are paid among us—and even with the unemployment allowances. Bread, it is true, costs less than in France (rye-bread in 1936 cost 0.85 r and white bread 1 rouble 70), but the most ordinary clothes and objects of prime necessity are exorbitantly dear. The rouble had a little lower purchasing power than our franc before its “alignment.”\* And don’t let people talk of the various advantages by which the worker benefits over and above his salary; advantages as a rule go solely to high salaries.

One wonders why these prices of manufactured goods, and even of natural produce (such as milk, butter, eggs, meat, etc.) should be so high when the State is the seller. But as long as commodities are in insufficient quantities, as long as supply is so lamentably

\* In 1936 the purchasing power of an average monthly wage was 550 lbs. of rye bread. In 1914 the purchasing power of the 30 roubles, which was an average worker’s salary per month, was 1,200 lbs. of this bread.



inferior to demand, it is no bad thing somewhat to discourage the latter. Goods will be supplied only to those who are capable of paying high prices. It is only the greater number who will suffer from the scarcity.

The greater number in this case might very likely disapprove of the régime ; it will be necessary, therefore, to prevent them from speaking.\*

\* \* \*

When M. Jean Pons becomes ecstatic over the increasing rise in the average rate of wages,

In 1934 : 180 roubles (on an average)

In 1935 : 260 roubles (on an average)

In 1936 : 360 roubles (on an average)

I ask him to observe that the low wages of ordinary workers have remained the same, and that this *average* rise is due to the greater

\* Hence the recent frightful repressions. And yet Stalin himself said a few years ago : " One of two things—either we must give up optimism and bureaucratic methods, and allow the workers and peasants outside the Party who suffer from our mistakes to criticise us, or else discontent will go on increasing and we shall have criticism in the shape of insurrection." (Extract from a speech by Stalin, quoted by Souvarine ; *Stalin*, p. 350.)



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number of privileged persons and to their increased salaries.\*

The average wage, moreover, has not risen as much as the general cost of living, and on the other hand the rouble's purchasing power is diminishing.†

So this paradoxical state of things arises—wages of five roubles a day or even less, reduce the great majority of workers to almost the extreme limit of poverty, in order to allow a few privileged persons still more enormous salaries,‡ and in order to meet the expenses of

\*Friedmann endeavours to consider stakhanovism as a skilful means of raising salaries. I fear it should be above all looked upon as a means of exacting an increased output from the ordinary worker.

† We learn from official statistics that from 1923 to 1925 the total wage of the workers in heavy industry had increased by 50 per cent; but during the same period the increase in the salaries of government officials had been 94.8 per cent, and that of shop employees 103.3 per cent. Moreover, in consequence of the lowering of the rouble's purchasing power, the rise of salaries did not by any means represent a rise in the standard of living.

‡ There is no question of the worker having the benefit of the whole proceeds of his labour. Neither Marx nor Engels envisaged this.

The "surplus labour" of some which, in a capitalist society permits the idleness of others—of a few others—and brings about the antagonism of the classes that have thus been formed—this "surplus labour," according to Marx, cannot be abolished. (And Marx means by this



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an intensive propaganda destined to make our workmen believe that Russian workmen are happy. We should prefer to be told so a little less—which would allow them to become so a little more.

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that the worker must not hope to benefit personally by the totality of his labour.)

A certain amount of "surplus labour," he thinks, is necessitated by insurance against accidents, by . . . etc. I cannot here give a complete enumeration. There must be included in it, besides the accumulation providing for the upkeep of the machinery, "an additional portion for the extension of production," etc. Let us add, since the non-socialisation of neighbouring states forces us to (and this is the corollary of socialisation "in a single country"), the upkeep of the Red Army. This, I think, Marx would have admitted. But what would seem monstrous to him is that the surplus labour of some—of the great majority—should be used to permit the surplus salary of others. This is the road to the formation of a privileged class and certainly not to "a greater reduction of time devoted to material labour." (*Capital*, 14.)



## VI

To feel that one is no longer being exploited is immense. But to realise that one is still being exploited, and not to know by whom, to find no one at whose door to lay one's wretchedness, no one to accuse ! . . . Céline, I am afraid, is right when he sees in this disappearance of the grievance the very acme of horror. He says in his forcible words :

"At any rate, we people here have a good time. We aren't forced to pretend ! We are still 'trampled on.' We can still put down all the malefactions of Fate to blood-suckers, to that cancer 'the Exploiter' ! And then do what we bloody well please. Nothing said ! . . . But when one has lost the right to destroy ? And can't even give a croak ? Life becomes intolerable ! . . ." (*Mea culpa.*)

This morning (February 8th, 1937), X . . . triumphantly brought me last night's *Temps* and pointed out the following passage :

"In the course of the two Five Year plans, the Ukraine budget has multiplied by more



than seven times.\* The greater part of the new budget's expenditure is to be employed in social and cultural measures ; 2,564 million roubles on public education, and 1,227 million roubles on public health." Well ! What have you to say to that ?

I answer X . . . by opening Louis Fischer's book *Soviet Journey*, which is nevertheless so favourable to the U.S.S.R., and in my turn point out the following :

"My impression is that the reigning proletariat is in the act of losing ground to its rivals, for the sixteen new sanatoria in course of construction (at Kislovodsk, 'the largest thermal station in the world') are almost all being built by government services, such as the State Bank, the Commissariat of Heavy Industry, the Commissariat of Posts and Telegraphs, the *Pravda*, etc. All these public bodies also employ workers ; but I imagine that the officials have easier access to the baths and beds than the workers." †

\*This by no means resulted in the raising of small salaries. It is always at their expense that the "accumulation fund" is constituted.

† Louis Fischer's book, *Soviet Journey*, is very interesting. It is extremely favourable to the U.S.S.R. and its criticisms are discreet ; but all the same an attentive reader will detect them.

The charming description he gives of some of the small



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It is all very well for Louis Fischer to speak of the "indolence of the Trade Unions." To listen to him one might imagine that it depends merely upon them to prevent "the government officials, engineers and other groups, *strategically situated*, from seizing the best apartments and taking more than their share of the sanatoria etc. . . ." No, no ; Trade Unions are powerless where the bureaucracy dominates. Dictatorship of the proletariat, indeed ! We are further away from it than ever. We are nearer than ever to "the dictatorship of the bureaucracy over the proletariat."\*

For the proletariat no longer possesses even the possibility of electing a representative to defend its injured interests. Popular elections, whether secret ballots or not, are a humbug—a farce ; the nominations are all decided upon and imposed from above. The people only have the right to elect those who have been chosen beforehand. The proletariat has been

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Caucasian states makes one think that there are many branches of the Soviet tree which are still flourishing. It is the trunk itself that is rotting.

\* "In reality, the Trade Unions, as well as the Soviets, had ceased to exist (in 1924). The workers expected neither protection nor help from this spendthrift administration which was in the hands of an *apparatus* of 25,000 officials, strictly subordinate to the Party's bureaux."

*Souvarin* : STALIN ; p. 347.



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swindled. Gagged and bound hand and foot as it is, resistance is practically impossible. Ah ! Stalin has played his hand well and won his game skilfully ; to the loud applause of communists all the world over who still believe, and will long continue to believe, that in the U.S.S.R. at any rate, they have gained the victory, while all who do not applaud with them are considered enemies and traitors.

\* \* \*

The bureaucracy, which has been considerably re-inforced since the end of the Nep, has now invaded the Sovkhoses and Kolkhoses. According to an enquiry instituted by the *Pravda*, the number of useless employees\* among the personnel of the agricultural machine stations (to take only one example) may be estimated at more than 14 per cent. (*Pravda*, September 16th, 1936.)

Stalin himself, some people assert, has become the slave of this bureaucracy, which was at first created as a means of administration and then of coercion. Nothing is more difficult

\* Before the war, the remuneration of the bureaucracy devoured 8.5 per cent of the national revenues, and 19 per cent in 1927. I have no estimates more recent.



than to dislodge worthless idlers from a sinecure. As early as 1929 Ordjonikidze was staggered by this "colossal quantity of good-for-nothings" who will have nothing to say to real socialism, and whose only task is to prevent it from succeeding. "People whom nobody wants and nobody knows what to do with," said he, "are put on to control commissions." But the more incapable these people are, the more Stalin can count upon their conformism and devotion ; for they owe their advantageous situations to favour alone. Needless to say they are warm supporters of the régime. By serving Stalin's fortune, they are safeguarding their own.

\*            \*            \*

Of the three conditions Lenin considered essential for preventing officials from becoming bureaucrats, viz : (1) Perpetual liability to recall and eligibility at all times ; (2) pay equal to that of the average worker ; (3) participation of all in control and supervision, so that—he insisted—all should be officials temporarily, but no-one should be able to become a *bureaucrat*—of these three conditions not one is fulfilled.



It is impossible on returning from the U.S.S.R. to re-read Lenin's little book *State and Revolution* without an aching heart.\* For to-day, in the U.S.S.R. they are further off than they were yesterday, not only from the communist society of one's dreams, but even from the intermediate stage through which it might be possible to arrive at socialism.

In that same small book of Lenin's there is also the following passage :

"From what Kautsky says, one might think that if elective officials remain under socialism, bureaucrats and bureaucracy will also remain ! That is entirely incorrect. Marx took the example of the Commune to show that under socialism functionaries cease to be 'bureaucrats' and 'officials'—they change *in the degree*, as election is supplemented by the right of instant recall ; when, *besides this*, their pay is brought down to the level of the pay of the average worker ; when, *besides this*, parliamentary institutions are replaced by 'working cor-

\* "The first step in the working-class revolution is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy," say Marx and Engels in their famous Manifesto. Win the battle, indeed ! Democracy has not won but lost it.—*State and Revolution*, Little Lenin Library, Lawrence and Wishart.



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porations,' legislative and executive at one and the same time."

And then one wonders whether Kautsky has not now got his own back, and which of the two, whether Lenin or him, would Stalin to-day imprison or shoot?



## VII

On more than one point the New Constitution appears anxious to anticipate criticisms and parry thrusts which, it is clearly felt, will be all too well deserved. The leaders know perfectly well that the conduct of the machine has slipped out of the people's hands ; that all real connection between the people and those who are supposed to represent it, is severed. This is just what they want. It is therefore highly important for them to establish the belief that the connection has never been closer, that there will be a "reinforcement of the control of the masses with regard to the Soviet organs, and an increased responsibility of the Soviet organs towards the masses," as *L'Humanité* of March 13th puts it. "The new electoral system," this paper adds, "will consolidate the ties between the representatives of the people and the masses of electors." Excellent ! So magnificent in fact that further on in the same article it seems hardly worth while to conceal the intention of "directing the elections," of "criticising unsuitable



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candidates, of opposing them without waiting for their collapse at the moment of the secret ballot." How can one sufficiently admire such cautious forethought? For just think how unpleasant it would be to repeat the mistake of October 19th, 1934, when the people were allowed the possibility of electing (at the plenum of the Regional Committee of Kiev, for instance) "persons who have now been unmasked as enemies of the Party." Thence the necessity, quickly, before the elections, of "suppressing everything which hinders the development of the active nucleus of the Party." It is only after this that it will be possible to have "free" elections.

So I very much fear that a contributor to a certain newspaper (I will not mention his name, out of extreme anxiety not to do him harm) will get rapped over the knuckles for daring, in spite of his complete devotion to Stalin's U.S.S.R. and to the New Constitution, to hasard the following timid observation (February 27th, 1937): "What we fear is precisely that in the present system the organs of the State are no longer merged with the mass of the workers as they used to be in the Soviet system, but that, on the contrary, they tend to differentiate themselves from it.



“ Why ?

“ Well, because of the distance between each elector and between the electors and their deputy.”

And the rash critic recalls that “ the last statistics showed that one citizen out of sixty was a deputy to some soviet,” and that “ this soviet, whichever it might be, was a stone in the pyramid and exercised its influence on the general policy of the country.” Now that is the very thing that was a nuisance. It was that that had to be put to rights. “ The permanent political cell at the base no longer exists.” \*

We must therefore entirely agree with Sir Walter Citrine’s opinion that the U.S.S.R., like the other dictatorships, is governed by a handful of men, and that the great mass of the people † has no part, or at least only a very small part in the government of the country.

\* \* \*

Meanwhile, when the bill is presented, it is

\* I do not in the least believe in the wisdom of the greatest number ; but that is not the point. The point is that this greatest number should be allowed, when it suffers, to make known its grievances ; and that the deputy who transmits them should be listened to.

† What Citrine said in 1935 he could repeat with even greater assurance since the New Constitution.



always the people that has to foot it, in however indirect a manner. In one way or another, whether it be by the exportation of foodstuffs—of which, nevertheless, they have the greatest need—or by the monstrous gap between the price of agricultural products and the price of these same products when they are retailed to the consumer, or by direct levies—it is always at the expense of the working and peasant classes, at the expense of their “consumers’ fund,” that the necessary and always inadequate accumulation fund is constituted. This was true from the start of the first Five Year plan and still continues to be true. When this accumulation fund, besides providing the necessary momentum for the whole machine, is devoted to practical, utilitarian and philanthropic purposes, we may perhaps allow it. It is possible to believe that the hospitals, rest-homes, cultural establishments, etc., may benefit the people—or at any rate to hope it. But what is to be thought when, during a period of such dire distress, this accumulation fund goes to erect a Palace of Soviets (of the defunct Soviets) the better to astound and delight Comrade Jean Pons ! A monument, 415 metres (about 1,260 feet) high (“The New-Yorkers,” says he, “are green



with envy,"), surmounted by a statue of Lenin, 70 or 80 metres in height, made of stainless steel, one of whose fingers alone is ten metres long.\* Well! Well! The worker will at least know why he is starving. He will even be able to think it worth while. In the absence of bread, he may puff himself out with that thought. (But perhaps it is mostly other people who will puff themselves out.) And the best of it is that he will be got to vote for the palace. You'll see! And unanimously too! They—the Russian people—will be asked which they prefer—better material conditions or the palace. And there will not be one of them who will not answer, who will not feel bound to answer, "the palace first."

"At the sight of each new palace that I see erected in the capital, I seem to see a whole country laid low in tumble-down cottages," wrote Jean-Jacques (*Contrat Social*, III, 13). In tumble-down cottages—the Soviet workers? Ah! Would to Stalin that they were! The Soviet workers are herded in slum dwellings.

\* \* \*

\* We do not permit ourselves to question the figures furnished by Jean Pons, either here or elsewhere. But a finger ten metres long for a total height of 70 to 80 metres? . . . Let us hope at least that Lenin is seated.



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I knew nothing of all this when I was in the U.S.S.R., just as I knew nothing of the functioning of the great concessionaire companies when I travelled in the Congo. In the U.S.S.R., as in the Congo, I saw disastrous effects, the causes of which I could not then properly understand. It is only since writing my book on the U.S.S.R., that I have completed my education. Citrine, Trotsky, Mercier, Yvon, Victor Serge, Leguay, Rudolf and many others have helped me with their documentation. Everything they have taught me—so far I had only suspected it—has confirmed and reinforced my fears. It is high time that the Communist Party of France should consent to open its eyes, high time that this lying should cease. If not, it is for the mass of workers to understand that they are being duped by the communists, just as the communists are being duped by Moscow.



## VIII

I had soaked too deeply in Marxist writings for the last three years to feel myself very much of a stranger in the U.S.S.R. On the other hand, I had read too many books of travel, enthusiastic descriptions, apologies. My great mistake was to have put too much faith in all these encomiums. And then too, everything that might have served me as a warning was said in such an acrimonious tone. . . . I am more inclined to believe love than hate. Yes, I was full of trust, confidence. And indeed what disturbed me most when I got there, was not so much to find imperfections, as to meet once again with the advantages I had wanted to escape from, the privileges I had hoped were abolished. Certainly I thought it natural that a guest should be received as well as possible and everywhere shown the best. But what astonished me was that there was such a gap between this best and the common lot ; such excessive privilege beside so mediocre or so bad an ordinary.

It is perhaps a failing of my mind and its



protestant formation that I distrust ideas that are profitable and opinions that are "comfortable"; I mean those from which the holder may hope to benefit.

And of course I see that without any actual attempt at corruption it may very well be advantageous for the Soviet Government to make the way smooth for artists and writers and for all who will sing its praises; but I also see only too well how advantageous it may be for the writer to approve a government and a constitution which favour him to such an extent. This at once puts me on my guard. I am afraid of letting myself be seduced. The excessive advantages I am offered over there frighten me. I did not go to the U.S.S.R. to meet with privileges over again. Those that awaited me were flagrant.

And why should I not say so?

I had learnt from the Moscow newspapers that in a few months, more than 400,000 copies of my books had been sold. I leave you to calculate the percentage of author's rights. And the articles so richly paid for! If I had written dithyrambics on the U.S.S.R. and Stalin, what a fortune! . . .

These considerations would not have restrained my praise; neither will they prevent



my criticisms. But I confess that the extraordinarily privileged position (more so than in any other country in Europe) granted to anyone who holds a pen—provided he writes in the proper spirit—contributed not a little to open my eyes. Of all the workers and artisans in the U.S.S.R. writers are much the most favoured. Two of my travelling companions (each of them had the translation of one of his books in the press) searched the shops for antiques, curiosities, bric-à-brac—something on which to spend the thousands or so roubles they had cashed and knew they would not be able to take away with them. As for me, I could hardly make any impression on an enormous balance, for everything was offered me gratis. Yes, everything ; from the journey itself to my packets of cigarettes. And every time I took out my note-case to settle a hotel or restaurant bill, to pay an account, to buy stamps or a newspaper, the delightful smile and authoritative gesture of our guide stopped me. “You’re joking ! You are our guest, and your five companions too.”

No, I had nothing to complain of during the whole course of my tour in the U.S.S.R., and of all the spiteful explanations that have been invented to invalidate my criticisms, that



which tried to put them down to the score of personal dissatisfaction is certainly the most absurd. I had never before travelled in such sumptuous style. In special railway carriages or the best cars, always the best rooms in the best hotels, the most abundant and the choicest food. And what a welcome ! What attentions ! What solicitude ! Everywhere acclaimed, flattered, made much of, feasted. Nothing seemed too good, too exquisite to offer me. I should have been ungracious indeed to repulse such advances ; I could not do so ; and I keep a marvellous remembrance of it all, the liveliest gratitude. But these very favours constantly brought to mind privileges, differences where I had hoped to find equality.

When, after escaping with great difficulty from official receptions and official supervision, I managed to get into contact with labourers whose wages were only four or five roubles a day, what could I think of the banquet in my honour which I could not avoid attending ? An almost daily banquet at which the abundance of the hors-d'œuvre alone was such that one had already eaten three times too much before beginning the actual meal ; a feast of six courses which used to last two hours and left you completely stupefied. The



expense ! Never having seen a bill, I cannot exactly estimate it, but one of my companions who was well up in the prices of things calculates that each banquet, with wines and liqueurs, must have come to more than three hundred roubles a head. Now there were six of us—seven with our guide ; and often as many hosts as guests, sometimes many more.\*

During our whole tour we were not, properly speaking, the guests of the Government but of the wealthy Society of Soviet Authors. When I think of the expenses it incurred on our behalf, I doubt whether the gold-mine of my author's rights which I am leaving them will be sufficient to re-imburse them.

\* I copy this page from my diary which I wrote up daily: "Dinner, ordered for 8 o'clock, began at 8.30. At 9.15 they had not finished handing round the hors d'œuvre.

Herbart, Dabit, Koltsov and I had been to bathe in the Park of Culture and were very hungry. I devoured large quantities of little patties. As we were expected at the convalescent home, I left the table at about 9.30, when I saw soup spoons being brought in. A vegetable soup with morsels of chicken; *timbales de queues d'écrevisses* added to *timbales de champignons*, then fish, various roasts and vegetables . . . I gave up in order to go and finish packing my suit-case and write 'a few lines' for the *Pravda* about the day's ceremony. I returned to table in time to gulp down an enormous chunk of *bombe glacée*. I not only have a horror of these feasts—I greatly disapprove of them. (I must have it out with Koltsov about this.) They are not only absurd, but immoral—anti-social."



## AFTERTHOUGHTS ON THE U.S.S.R.

Evidently they counted on other results than this from such generous treatment. And I think that part of the resentment shown against me by the *Pravda* comes from this—that I have not been a very “paying proposition.”

I assure you that there is something tragic about my Soviet experience. I had come as an enthusiast, as a convinced supporter, to admire a new world, and to *win my affections*. I was offered all the prerogatives I abominated in the old one.

“You understand nothing at all about it,” said an excellent Marxist to me. “Communism only objects to the exploitation of man by man. How often must you be told so? When that is once abolished, you may be as rich as an Alexis Tolstoy or a singer in grand opera, as long as you have earned your fortune by your own work. In your scorn and hatred of money and possessions, I see a regrettable survival of your former Christian views.”

“Possibly.”

“And you must admit that they have nothing whatever to do with Marxism.”

“Alas ! . . .”

\* \* \*



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I know perfectly well and am repeatedly told that some of the Russian characteristics, and those often the most charming, such as the sudden cordiality, the unthinking generosity which so quickly gained my sympathy, as well as those flagrant defects that jeopardise the success of their enterprises, may be imputed to their semi-oriental temperament and not to the new régime. I should have met, people say, with practically the same defects or qualities in the time of the tsars. And indeed I think it is a mistake to expect and hope a profound change of human nature solely from altered circumstances. Don't misunderstand me : it is of great, it is already of sufficient importance that they should allow of such a change ; but much as that is, they will not cause it. For there is nothing mechanical here, and, without the reform of the individual human heart, bourgeois society re-shapes itself, the 'old Adam' reappears and begins to flourish afresh.

So long as man is oppressed, so long as the constraint of social injustice keeps him prostrate, we are free to expect great things from that part of him which has not yet developed. Just as one often expects marvels



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from children who later on turn into quite ordinary adults. One often has the illusion that the people are composed of men superior to the disappointing rest of mankind. I think simply that they are less *spoilt* ; but that money would corrupt them like the others. Look at what is happening in the U.S.S.R. The new bourgeoisie that is forming has all the defects of ours. No sooner has it emerged from poverty than it despises the poor. Greedy of all the satisfactions it was so long deprived of, it knows how to set about getting and keeping them. "Are these really the men who made the Revolution?" I asked in my *Back from the U.S.S.R.* And answered: "No; they are the men who profit by it." They may be members of the Party—there is nothing communist in their hearts.



## IX

This remains however—the Russian people seem happy. I entirely agree on this point with Vildrac and Jean Pons, and it was with a sort of home-sickness that I read the accounts of their travels. For, as I too have said, nowhere so much as in the U.S.S.R. do the people themselves, the faces one sees in the streets, (at any rate the young ones), the factory workers, the crowds that throng the places of amusement, rest or culture, nowhere do they show so cheerful an aspect. How can this appearance be reconciled with the frightful poverty in which, as we now know, the greater number are plunged?

Those who have travelled widely in the U.S.S.R. assure me that Vildrac, Pons and myself would have changed our note if we had left the great touristic routes. They speak of whole districts where the distress stares one in the face. And then . . .

Excessive poverty in the U.S.S.R. is not looked upon with favour. It keeps in hiding. You would think it was culpable. It would



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be exposed not to pity, not to the succour of charity, but to contempt. The people who show themselves are those whose comfort is obtained at the expense of this excessive poverty. And yet quantities of others too—even some who are starving—keep smiling. Their happiness is made, as I said before, “of confidence, ignorance and hope.”\*

There are enough of these to make a crowd—the crowd we admire.

If everything we see in the U.S.S.R. seems cheerful, it is because everything that is not cheerful is suspect, because it is extremely dangerous to be unhappy, or at any rate, to *look* unhappy. Russia is not the place for lamentation—but Siberia.

\*       \*       \*

The U.S.S.R. is prolific enough to allow murderous drives to be made among its human

\*The Russian people's prodigious aptitude for *life* must be mentioned too. “The vitality of a cat,” says Dostoevski, in wonder at having gone through unparalleled trials, if not without suffering, at any rate, without being crushed. A love of life that triumphs over everything, out of indifference, possibly, or apathy, but rather, more often out of abounding richness of heart, amusement, lyrical enthusiasm, an artesian welling up of incomprehensible, inexplicable gladness, no matter when, no matter how,



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live-stock without its being apparent. Such impoverishment is all the more tragic because it is imperceptible. Those who disappear, who are made to disappear, are the most valuable ; not perhaps as material assets, but because they are the ones who differ, who diverge from the mass, and the unity, the uniformity of the mass are thus ensured, but only at a lower and ever lower level of mediocrity.

Free criticism, liberty of thought—these in the U.S.S.R. are called “the opposition.” Stalin will bear nothing but approval ; all who do not applaud him he considers his enemies. It often happens that he adopts as his own a reform proposed by someone else ; but if he adopts the idea—in order to make it the better his own, he first suppresses the proposer of it. That is his way of being right. Soon then no-one will be left about him but those who cannot put him in the wrong because they have no more ideas at all. That is the characteristic of despotism—to surround itself

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no matter where . . . I should say rather an extraordinary aptitude—an extraordinary propensity to gladness. In spite of everything. This indeed is what makes Dostoevski so representative. This too is where he touches me so profoundly, so fraternally, and through him, with him, the whole Russian people. No other people would have lent themselves so magnanimously to so tragic an experience.



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with men chosen not for their value but for their servility.

If any workers, whoever they may be, are brought for any reason, be it what it may, before any tribunal whatever, however just their cause, woe betide the advocate who defends them, if once the authorities desire them to be condemned.

\* \* \*

And those who are deported in their thousands ! . . . Those who could not, would not, bow their heads as low, as long, as meekly as was required of them.

I feel no need to say as M . . . did recently, " Good Lord ! it might well happen to me one of these days ! " I see these victims, I hear them, I feel them all round me. Last night it was their gagged cries that woke me ; to-day it is their silence that dictates these lines. It was while thinking of these martyrs that I wrote the words against which you protest, and because their unspoken gratitude, if my book ever reaches them, is more to me than the praises or the curses of the *Pravda*.

No-one intervenes on *their* behalf. The " right " newspapers use them at most to cavil



at a régime they abominate ; those who have at heart the ideals of justice and liberty, those who enter the lists in favour of Thaelmann—Barbusse, Romain Rolland and their like—have kept silent, still keep silent ; and round them—silent too—the immense hosts of the blinded proletariat.

But when I grow indignant, you explain—and in Marx's name too—that this certain, undeniable evil (I am not speaking only of the deportations, but also of the excessive poverty, of the inadequacy or the enormity of salaries, of the regained privileges, of the deceitfully re-established classes, of the disappearance of the Soviets, of the progressive vanishing of all that 1917 had conquered)—you learnedly explain that this evil is necessary, that you, the intellectual, versed in all the arguments (and arts) of dialectics, you consent to it as being temporary and as leading to better things. You, intelligent communist, you agree to recognise this evil, but you consider it better to hide it from others less intelligent than yourself, others who might be made indignant by it.

\* \* \*



## AFTERTHOUGHTS ON THE U.S.S.R.

That partisans should make use of my writings is not a thing I can prevent, nor even if I could, should I want to. But to write anything whatever in view of the use a political party might make of it—no ! I leave that to others. I warned my new communist friends of this at the very outset of our relations—I shall never be a reassuring recruit—an easy recruit.

Somewhere or other I have read that the intellectuals who come to communism should always be looked upon by the Party as “unstable elements” which may be made use of but which must always be watched with suspicion. How true this is ! I said so over and over again to Vaillant-Couturier ; but he would not listen.

No party in the world will ever prevent me from preferring Truth to the Party. As soon as falsehood comes in, I am ill at ease. My rôle is to denounce it. It is to Truth that I am attached. If the Party abandons it, then I abandon the Party.

I know very well (you have told me so often enough) that from the Marxist point of view *Truth* does not exist—in the absolute at any



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rate ; that it is only relative ; but in this case it is precisely a question of relative truth and you distort it. And I believe that in such serious matters you deceive yourselves when you try to deceive others. For those you deceive in this case are just the very ones you claim to be serving—the people. You serve it ill by blinding it.

It is essential to see things as they *are* and not as we should have liked them to be.

The U.S.S.R. is not what we had hoped it would be, what it promised to be, what it still strives to appear. It has betrayed all our hopes. If we cannot resign ourselves to losing them altogether, we must place them elsewhere.

But we will not turn aside our eyes from Russia, glorious and ill-fated Russia, who still contrives to instruct us, who, if at first she served as an example to be followed, now, alas, gives us warning of the quicksands in which a revolution may be choked.







## APPENDIX







## APPENDIX

### TRAVELLING-COMPANIONS

#### I

As I was very much afraid of proving inadequate by myself, I took the precaution of bringing five companions with me. I was anxious also that they too should enjoy the extraordinary facilities and amenities of this journey. They were all enraptured in anticipation, strung up to the highest pitch of excitement, as fervent as myself, won over heart and soul by the U.S.S.R. and by all it promised for the future, enthusiastic adepts of the régime ; and yet very different from me, in age (all much younger than I) and in character, by their upbringing and their environment ; very different from each other too. In spite of all this, we understood each other perfectly. Yes, I thought that to see and hear properly, six pairs of eyes and ears would be none too many, and would enable us to compare and check our inevitably different reactions.

You know who these companions were :



Jef Last, Schiffrin, Eugène Dabit, Pierre Herbart, Louis Guilloux.

Of these five, two had long been members of the Party—most devoted, active members ; two spoke Russian. Furthermore, it was Jef Last's fourth journey to the U.S.S.R., and Pierre Herbart had been living in Moscow for the last six months. He had worked there as editor of the propaganda review *International Literature*, which comes out in four languages, and this had brought him inside knowledge of various intrigues and enabled him to pick up a great deal of information. He is gifted into the bargain with unusual perspicacity and no doubt he greatly helped to open my eyes ; I mean to say that he threw light on many things that I should certainly not have understood by myself. I will give one small example of this.

The day after our arrival in Moscow (Pierre Herbart and I had travelled by air from Paris, where Herbart had come to spend a week, so that we were in advance of the others who were due to arrive in Leningrad ten days later in a Soviet ship) Bukharin came to see me. Bukharin's credit still stood very high. The last time he had made a public appearance he had received an enthusiastic ovation.



Nevertheless some insidious signs of disfavour were already visible, and Pierre Herbart had encountered a great deal of opposition before he had been able to print a very remarkable article of Bukharin's in *International Literature*. It was useful to know all this, but I only learnt it later. Bukharin came to visit me alone, but he had hardly entered the private sitting-room of the sumptuous apartment that had been put at my disposal at the Hotel Metropole, when a so-called journalist pushed his way in and joined in our conversation, making it impossible for us to continue it. Bukharin rose almost immediately and, as I accompanied him into the ante-chamber, said that he hoped very much to see me again.

I met him three days later at Gorki's funeral, or rather the day before, when the public were admitted to file past the monumental catafalque covered with flowers on which Gorki's body rested while awaiting cremation. In a neighbouring room which was much smaller, various "responsible heads" were gathered together, and among them Dimitrov, whom I had never met, and whom I went up to greet. Bukharin was standing nearby and when I had left Dimitrov, he took my arm. "May I come and see you in an hour's time at the



Metropole ? ” he asked. “ I want to speak to you.”

Pierre Herbart who was with me heard him and said to me in a whisper, “ I bet you he won’t be able to.”

So it turned out. For Koltsov, who had seen Bukharin approach me, at once took him aside. I don’t know what he said, but, during the whole of my stay in Moscow I did not see Bukharin again.

Without this little word of warning, the episode would have been lost on me. I should have taken it for indifference, carelessness—thought that Bukharin did not want to see me again as much as all that, but never that *he had not been able to*.

From Leningrad, where Pierre Herbart and I had gone to welcome Guilloux, Schiffrin, Last and Dabit on landing, we had returned to Moscow in our special railway-carriage. A few days later, the same carriage took us to Ordjonikidze ; then, we crossed the Caucasus in three comfortable motor cars which on the second day deposited us at Tiflis. We arrived in the capital of Georgia a day later than had been intended, so that the Georgian poets who had so kindly come to meet us at the frontier-



post of their country, had to wait twenty-four hours. I take the opportunity of saying here what a lasting impression was left on me by the exquisite courtesy of their welcome, by their constant attentions and kindness. If by some miracle this book ever reaches them, I should like them to know that, in spite of all they may have been told, I still feel profoundly grateful to them.

## II

Tiflis, which had at first very much disappointed us, soon attracted us more and more every day. We lingered there two weeks. It was from there that we started off for a four days excursion to Kakhetia which turned out wonderfully interesting in every way, but so trying that Schiffrin and Guilloux, who are unaccustomed to the fatigues of travelling, declared on our return that they had had their fill of sights and excitement of all sorts, and that they wished to go back to France.

We took leave of them with regret, for their companionship was delightful, but we afterwards congratulated ourselves that they had not had to endure still greater fatigue on account of the increasing heat.

Nevertheless, this second part of our journey



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was by far the most instructive. Less strictly guarded, less circumvented than at first, we were able to get into more direct contact with the people, and it was only from Tiflis on that our eyes were really opened.

Not for twenty years, said some, not for fifty, said others, had such high temperatures been recorded. But we did not find the heat oppressive, and nothing led us to foresee the sudden illness which was to carry Dabit off three weeks later. I particularly wish to protest—and to protest indignantly—against certain insinuations which were set about concerning his illness. A mistaken diagnosis, say the least malicious. It is possible that in the U.S.S.R. a whole series of analogous infections due to various streptococci are classified as *scarlet fever*. Dabit did not have any of those attacks of vomiting which, I understand, characterise the beginning of true scarlet fever. Shortly after my return to Paris, I came across a medical review in which was a statistical table of the incidence of diseases, and I was astonished at the enormous proportion of “scarlet fevers” in the U.S.S.R., not only in comparison with other countries, but also in comparison with the proportion of other diseases in the U.S.S.R. itself. This



makes me suppose that the term is more elastic and comprehensive there than with us. But granting this (and it in no way implies mistaken diagnosis, which can occur equally well in Paris, as I know from two shocking examples in the cases of Charles-Louis Philippe and Jacques Rivière, who were both treated at first for ordinary influenza, it being discovered too late that they were suffering from typhoid fever), I affirm positively that Dabit was surrounded with the most constant care by three of the best doctors of Sebastopol and by Comrade Bola, who once more gave proof of her absolute devotion.

I must likewise protest against another insinuation relating to Dabit's *note-books*. These note-books, with all the other papers belonging to him, were returned to his family through my intermediary, though it is true that they were held back by the authorities for some time. They contained, as a matter of fact, nothing whatever to alarm the censorship. Dabit was extremely prudent. He told me more than once that he trusted to me to speak, being anxious not to be involved in discussions which might imperil his tranquillity and his work. It was almost wholly with his work that his thoughts were concerned during



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his last days\*—a novel about which he had talked to me a great deal, and which he intended to re-write entirely now that he saw more clearly what he wanted ; and I think he would have kept hardly any of the hundred pages he had written before leaving France.

\*Jef Last and Pierre Herbart, who alternately shared his room during the last days, and with whom he had the opportunity of talking even more frequently and more intimately than with me, know it. And it was this that made them protest against the accusation launched by Monsieur Pierre Scize (and afterwards taken up very courteously by Friedmann) that I had made unfair use of Dabit's name, without having any right to do so, by dedicating my book to him.

Extract from an article by P. Herbart :—

" I should like to bring to Friedmann's notice—in reply to his remarks about the dedication of *Back from the U.S.S.R.* to Eugène Dabit—a conversation I had with Dabit at Sebastopol a few days before his death.

" He seemed excessively anxious that Gide, when he got back to France, should publicly express the fears he had so often shared with him in the course of our journey. ' *He* will be able to make himself heard,' he said. ' People will understand that he speaks as a friend.'

" Whatever one's views may be about this sort of dedication, it seems to me impossible to dispute that it was Gide's right, and even his duty, to associate our friend's name with his reflexions on the U.S.S.R."

(January 29th, 1937.)

And this letter from Jef Last :—

" My dear Friedmann,

I am very much surprised to see the following passage in your article :

' But would not Dabit, more than Gide, have criticised



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"I shall begin work on it again as soon as I get back," he kept repeating. And this inward urge was so pressing that he talked of going back alone at once, if we decided to prolong our journey, as we were then thinking of doing, by staying at Odessa and then at Kiev on the way home.

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and completed these impressions (he proposed to prolong his stay in the U.S.S.R., spoke of returning to it)? Would he not have grasped better than Gide that the limits of their purely psychological value had been overstepped? Would he have consented to give these impressions (whose inadequacy he himself admitted to me at the time of our meeting on the Black Sea) such tremendous political reverberation, and at such a moment?

These questions may be put, and this possibility is enough to make me feel I have no right to suppress them.'

All this does not seem to me very accurate.

Already at Tiflis, Dabit was beginning to show a disconcerting lack of interest in the journey. I had many conversations with him, but he never expressed any desire to stay longer in the U.S.S.R. or to return to it. On the contrary, he obstinately objected to our plan of prolonging our stay by visiting Kiev. He wanted to return to Moscow at once and thence by aeroplane to Paris. Dabit several times expressed his desire to settle down and work quietly in some small village in Spain in order to finish his book on El Greco. Many things shocked him in the U.S.S.R., things we had all noticed with regret, but which roused very different reactions in each of us. Dabit often talked about them to Gide, and as he was not pugnacious by nature, he relied upon Gide to speak. I take upon myself to say that the book Gide has written is in fact the one that Dabit had expected and demanded from him.

JEF LAST."



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Dabit was obviously—like me, like all of us—very much upset by many things, in spite of all the occasions we had for being enraptured, for he had hoped, as we all had, to find nothing but such occasions in the U.S.S.R. Coming as he did from the people, and profoundly attached with all his heart and mind to the proletarian cause, he was on the other hand far from pugnacious and much nearer to Sancho Panza than to Don Quixote ; he had worked out for himself a wisdom in the style of Montaigne's and used to maintain that he cared for life far more than for any ideal, and that no ideal was worth the sacrifice of one's life. He was obviously in a great state of distress about the events in Spain, and his anxiety showed itself by the very fact that he could not endure it to be doubted, even for a moment, that the Government side would triumph. He was not content with hoping and believing in this triumph, he constantly needed to be assured of it. But he violently disapproved of Jef Last when Jef spoke of going to Spain to enlist in the militia (which he did soon after). One evening at Sebastopol, on the eve of the last day we were to spend together, I saw him get really angry—he who as a rule was so calm ; for had not Jef Last declared that he would



rather see his children die than fall under a fascist domination ?

"What you're saying is monstrous," shouted Dabit (it was the first time I had heard such a tone of voice from him), as he struck his fist on the table where we had all three just finished dining. "Monstrous ! You've not got the right to sacrifice other people's lives for an idea ; you've not even got the right to sacrifice your own. Life is more precious than everything."

He said a great deal more, suddenly inspired with extraordinary eloquence. So indeed was Jef ; and I contented myself with listening to them, approving now one and now the other, according as one or the other was speaking ; or rather, if it was Jef I admired more and the passion that animated him, it was Dabit whom I chiefly approved and the revolt of his common sense. Above all I felt that it was a good thing that there should be some of both in humanity—a good thing that one should season the other. But I suddenly intervened when Jef, in replying to Dabit, spoke of *cowardice*, and protested that such a word was out of place among us, and that if great courage was often needed to fight, no less courage was sometimes needed to declare that one would not fight.



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As I write this, I suddenly think of Giono and his *Refus d'Obéissance*. Dabit was very fond of Giono and in some ways resembled him. Both had in a high degree the taste and "feeling for bread and cheese" (only those who have got it too will understand the meaning of this expression).\* We had often spoken of Giono in the Caucasus, thinking that this wild and luxuriant country would be extraordinarily to his liking, thinking too that he would sometimes have greatly suffered—wherever indeed the "feeling for bread and cheese" is on the decline.

It was not as though Dabit actually lost interest in the journey; but he nevertheless took less part in it, gave himself up to it less than we did; he used to withdraw more and more into his shell and busy himself with reading or writing or making love.† He was

\* "They lie! They all lie!" said X . . . to us at Tiflis *à propos* of the Soviet leaders. Herbert and I were his only listeners. "They've lost all contact with genuine reality. They are all theorists, lost in abstractions." His voice was trembling with emotion. And finally this sentence which I had not particularly noticed at first and which Herbert reminded me of later, for he thought it admirable (as indeed it was) and often quoted it: "They have lost the feeling for bread and cheese."

† "Oh, how I long for solitude and silence!" he noted in his private diary a few days before his death.



reading Gogol's *Dead Souls* in Mongault's translation which I had brought with me, and sometimes he would point out a passage for me to admire. In particular a few lines from Gogol's *Four Letters* that figure at the beginning of the second volume of his *Poem*, and which I have quoted in my *Back from the U.S.S.R.* ; and this other passage which makes us doubt whether really, as we are so often told, nothing or next to nothing had been done for the people in the time of the tsars—nothing, at any rate that could be boasted of.

“Nearly a hundred and fifty years have gone by since the Emperor Peter I unsealed our eyes by initiating us into European culture, and placed in our hands all the means of action . . . ”

Since that time “the Government has not ceased to act : whole volumes of rules, decrees, ordinances, are witness to this, as well as multitudes of buildings erected, books published, all kinds of good works founded—scholastic, charitable, philanthropic, without counting others *the like of which cannot be found among the institutions of foreign governments.*”

If bluff there is, it is clear that it does not date from to-day.



## PAGES FROM A DIARY

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Koltsov, ever affable, is in a confidential mood. I know perfectly well that he will tell me nothing that he does not think is advantageous to tell me, but he does it in such a way as to make me feel flattered by his confidence. To the tune of "I have nothing to hide from *you*," he begins :

"You can't imagine the extraordinary novelty of the problems that confront us at every turn and for which we have to find fresh solutions. Just think, at the present moment our best workers, the stakhanovists, are deserting the factories wholesale."

"How do you account for that ?"

"Oh ! it's very easy. They get such enormous salaries that they couldn't manage to spend them, even if they wanted to ; for there are still very few things to buy on the market—which is indeed a serious source of anxiety to us. So then they save ; and when



they have put by a few thousand roubles, they go off together in large parties to enjoy a gay life in style on our Riviera. And we can't prevent them. As they are our best workers, they know they must always be taken on again. They come back at the end of a month—of two months—when they have come to an end of their money. They are perforce engaged again: they can't be spared."

"That must be very awkward for you. Are there many of them?"

"Thousands. Observe that every worker has a right to holidays with pay. These holidays are granted at convenient times and of course not all at once, so as not to interfere with the working of the factories. But in this case it's quite different. In this case it's *they* who pay, and they take their holidays when and how they please and all together."

He laughed gently. I refrained from saying, but not from thinking, "If the case was so serious, he wouldn't speak of it in this way." But it gives him an opportunity a moment later of showing off another of Stalin's ingenious devices.

He has had the brilliant notion of re-



## AFTERTHOUGHTS ON THE U.S.S.R.

instating female coquetry, dress, beauty culture in a place of honour.\*

"Be attentive to the ladies, comrades. Say it with flowers. Spend money on them."

Quantities of new shops have been opened recently, and it was not one of my least surprises in the U.S.S.R. to see the numbers of manicures and the quantities of painted women with red nails to be met with everywhere, chiefly, of course on the Crimean Riviera.

\* \* \*

"How much do you earn a month?"  
Comrade H . . . asked the manageress of the  
"beauty-parlour" of the Hotel X . . .

"A hundred and fifty roubles."

"With lodging?"

"No, nor board. You must count twenty roubles at least for a room."

\* The *Pravda* of December 31st, 1936, publishes letters from Kolkhose women on the subject of dress. One of them says:

"We can dress elegantly too, because we have taste and follow the fashion."

Another:

"As for me, I am tired of bell skirts and aeroplane blouses. But we are obliged to wear them for lack of new models. *We have the money.*"



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"So that leaves you only a hundred and thirty. And for your food?"

"Oh, I can't do with less than two hundred roubles."

"But then, how do you manage?"

"Oh! Madame," with a sad little smile, "there are ways . . ."

\* \* \*

Jef struck up a friendship at Sebastopol with a student who had nothing very remarkable about him, and for that very reason was especially interesting, because of his likeness to quantities of others. Jef gets information and passes it on to us.

X . . . is a fervent admirer of the régime. He is full of confidence and hope. As a first year student, he gets sixty roubles a month. He is looking forward to getting seventy next year, and eighty the third year. He might live in a students' hostel where the meals cost from one to two roubles, but he won't leave his old mother, an unskilled cook, who earns ninety roubles a month. They share the same room for which they pay ten roubles a month and live almost exclusively on black bread, and even of that they have not enough to satisfy



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their hunger (less than a lb. a day). But he says it is a "complete diet" and makes no complaint. He would very much like to bring a young woman to live in this room where there are two lodging already. His mother begs him to and would like to see him married ! But the new law against abortion terrifies him.

"Only think ! We find it so difficult to live as it is ! If there was a child to bring up as well . . . Oh ! I know what you'll say. But there are no contraceptives to be had, or they're of such bad quality that they can't be trusted. And it's not easy to take precautions, seeing the way we're lodged."

Then his optimism gets the upper hand and he concludes gaily that underfed as he is the best thing is to abstain.

If one of the doctors out there is to be believed, masturbation is more prevalent in the U.S.S.R. than in any other country.

\* \* \*

New buildings are under construction. The architect, N . . . shows plans of flats.

"What is this space for ?"

"The maid's room."

"The maid ? But surely there aren't any ?"



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And as in theory there aren't any maids, it is an excellent reason for making them sleep in the passage or the kitchen or no matter where.

What an admission it would be to provide a room for them ! If in the U.S.S.R. servants all the same do exist, it's so much the worse for them.

In Moscow those who come to offer their services at fifty roubles a month are almost all poor country girls, who have come up from their village in the hopes of finding work in town—in a factory or elsewhere. They take a place in the meanwhile ; it's a way of queuing up. My friends the H . . .'s floor neighbours have a maid who is with child. The neighbours engaged her out of sheer pity. She sleeps in a cupboard where she hasn't room to lie down. As for food . . .

She came to my friends, beseeching :

" Please, Madame, don't throw away your leavings."

She used to pick them out of the dust-bin.

\* \* \*

Oh, good Heavens ! I'm far from thinking that these official pronouncements, this



moulding of opinion carry with them everybody's private approval. There are names, and in particular Essenin's, which are only pronounced in a whisper; but they are pronounced. Or rather I should say they are still quoted, but in a whisper. I am very slightly acquainted with Essenin's poetry, but the trifling adventure that I am going to relate has given me a great desire to read him. Essenin killed himself, like Maïakovsky. A love-affair, it is said. Possibly. But we are free to imagine that some deeper cause drove him to suicide.

Now one night at Sochi, after an excellent meal, we were in a confidential mood. Wine and vodka egged us on. X . . . in particular, who had drunk gallons, became quite lyrical. Our guide was obviously getting slightly anxious. X . . . was about to talk too much . . . Hadn't he just announced that he wanted to recite some of Essenin's poetry! But our guide at once interposed.

"You're completely tight. You don't know what you're saying. Hold your tongue . . ." Upon which X . . . who, though drunk, was perfectly aware of everything and had himself well under control, momentarily held his tongue; then, making an excuse of his



drunkenness, he asked the guide to be so good as to get him a packet of cigarettes. And as soon as she had left us, X . . . began to recite an extraordinary poem which had been transmitted from mouth to mouth ever since it had been refused the *Imprimatur*. This poem had been written by Essenin in reply to a blasphemous article. The drift of it was this :

“When you declare against the popes,” said Essenin, addressing the author of the article, “we approve. We are with you when you make fun of Heaven and Hell, of the Blessed Virgin and God the Father. But when you speak of Christ, take care. Beware of forgetting that he who gave his life for men was not on the side of the great ones of this earth, but on the side of the disinherited and the humble, and that when they called him ‘Son of God,’ he found his greatest glory in being called ‘Son of Man.’”

It was not merely drunkenness that made X . . .’s voice tremble as he recited these lines, and that covered his face with tears. During the whole evening there had been nothing but the most trivial conversation . . . And yet no—as I write this I feel that I am wronging X . . . as well as ourselves. He had gradually excited us more and more ; we had been



thrilled by the tale of his prodigious adventures in China, of his successive captivities, of his escapes. He couldn't have been called handsome ; but his features glowed with a kind of fierce genius ; his voice which was at once harsh and burning, took on, when he recited those lines, an extraordinary sweetness which contrasted in the most singular way with the cynicism and brutality of his previous talk. It seemed as though he were revealing within himself regions full of secret tenderness, a whole unexplored continent which suddenly seemed to me the most genuine part of him, while the cynicism and brutality now appeared to me nothing more than an artificial covering which protected what was best in him. This indiscreet revelation lasted only a moment. Our guide rejoined us and the same noisy and empty conversation began again.\*

\*       \*       \*

At the very beginning of a long railway journey, a certain young Russian had attracted the interest and sympathy of my friend, Comrade H . . . But, she told me, it was only

\* I am told that there are a large number of apocryphal poems in circulation attributed to Essenin.



after sitting opposite her in a "hard" carriage for seven hours that he made up his mind to speak to her.

"He can't have been more than thirty, but one felt that life had already worn him out. I had to make innumerable advances in order to get anything more than an evasive answer to my questions. I was particularly careful to tell him that I was only a foreigner, that he had nothing to fear from me, that I should not tell tales . . . His wife was with him and also a little boy of three. I learnt that he had left two other children behind at X . . . out of economy and because of the uncertainty of what he was going to find in Moscow.

"The woman had no doubt been handsome, but she seemed to be recovering from some illness. To my great surprise I saw her several times give the child her breast, though of course he ought to have been weaned long ago. Her breast was as flaccid as an empty bladder and I don't know what the child can have got out of it ; but during the whole long journey it was all the food he was given. His parents seemed even more famished than their child. When, at last, the man began to talk, the young woman could not conceal her unspeakable anxiety. She looked all round to



see if any neighbours could hear. But there was nobody in our compartment but an old drunk who was fast asleep and a stupid looking peasant woman.

“‘He always talks much too much,’ she said to me as though to excuse herself. ‘That’s what’s always done for us.’

“Then he began to tell me about their life. All had gone well up to Kirov’s assassination. Then some mysterious informer had cast suspicion on him. As he was a very good worker and there were no complaints against him, he had not been dismissed at once from the factory where he worked. But little by little he had seen all his comrades, all his friends turn away from him. They were afraid of compromising themselves by speaking to him. Finally the manager of the factory sent for him and without actually dismissing him—for he had no grounds for doing so—*advised* him to look for work elsewhere. Ever since that day he had wandered from factory to factory, from town to town, more and more under suspicion, a hunted creature, meeting everywhere with distrust, always rejected, repulsed, deprived of all support, of all help, unable to obtain anything for his children either, and reduced to the most terrible poverty.



## AFTERTHOUGHTS ON THE U.S.S.R.

“‘It’s gone on for more than a year now,’ said the woman, ‘and we’re at our last gasp. During the last year or more, wherever we have gone, they have never let us stay more than a fortnight.’

“‘And if only,’ the man began again, ‘I could make out what I’m accused of. Somebody must have said something against me. I don’t know who. I don’t know what he can have said. I know only one thing—that there’s nothing they can reproach me with.’

“Then he explained to me the decision he had taken to go to Moscow to find out, to clear himself if possible, or to complete his ruin by protesting against a baseless suspicion.”

\* \* \*

There are packets of cigarettes at eighty kopeks and even at sixty ; they are what are called “proletarians” and are execrable. The “papirosi” we smoke—the only ones known to the foreigner—(some are called “intourist”) cost five or six roubles for a box of twenty. There are some which cost more.

Not knowing where to find a tobacconist (this was at Gori where we stopped for a few hours), Pierre Herbart asked a workman, with



whom he was talking on the banks of the river, to go and fetch him a packet of these "papirosi".

"What size?"

"A five rouble packet."

The workman, who was in an excellent humour, laughed as he said:

"A day's salary."

\* \* \*

Mme X . . . was making a tour of the countryside near Moscow in the company of a "responsible administrator"—that is what they are called out there. This one affects great familiarity with all the workmen he comes across. "I like them to feel at home with me. I talk to them as if they were comrades, brothers; and they are never afraid of speaking to me." Presently a road-mender turned up, and as though to prove what he had just been saying, the responsible administrator exclaimed:

"Well, my dear fellow, how are you getting on? Are you pleased?"

"Will you allow me, comrade," said the workman, "to put a question to you?"

"Go ahead, my dear fellow. I'm here to answer questions."



## AFTERTHOUGHTS ON THE U.S.S.R.

"You who know about things, you'll be able to tell me, no doubt. When will the day come for us to work no more than our strength allows and eat our fill?"

"And what did the responsible administrator answer?" I in my turn asked Mme X...

"He gave him a lecture on doctrine."

\* \* \*

On the way to Batum in a car. My companions admire, on both sides of the road, the new plantations of trees which, in a few years time, are to provide shade. Why should I point out to them that among all these trees there is not a single one that is not dead. They were no doubt planted at the wrong moment—at a time of the year, I mean, which was unfavourable to their taking root, and in obedience, I suppose, to an order from above which had to be carried out at once without making objections. It is nature's business to submit, whether trees are concerned or men.

\* \* \*

Large quantities of monkeys are bred here (at Sukhum) for the purpose of providing



Voronof grafts and making various experiments. I wanted to find out where these animals came from ; but the information one gets here is as manifold and contradictory as in the colonies. Most of these people's minds enjoy vagueness and redundancy—particularly that of the charming comrade who serves us as guide and interpreter. Nothing indeed ever floors her and she provides an answer to everything ; the more ignorant she is of a subject the more cocksure she becomes ; but she is not conscious of being ignorant, and her attitude convinces me more than ever that unconscious ignorance induces sweeping assertions. These people's minds are stuffed with approximations, with imitation goods, with substitutes . . .

“ Could I find out what country the monkeys which are bred here come from ? ”

“ Of course. Nothing could be easier.”

(In her turn she questions the person who accompanies us.)

“ Most of these monkeys were born in this very place. Yes, they were almost all born here.”

“ But we've been told that there were no monkeys in the country. So at first they must have been brought from somewhere else.”

“ Of course.”



“ Well, then, from where ? ”

Her answer came pat ; without referring to the other person :

“ Oh ! from here, there and everywhere,” she said with assurance.

Our charming guide is as obliging and devoted as it is possible to be. But there is this about her that is rather fatiguing—the information she gives us is never precise except when it is wrong.

\* \* \*

*Back in Paris.*

“ Where on earth did you get the notion that these higher officials are such extremely privileged persons ? ” said that excellent C . . . who has just come back quite dazzled.

“ I saw a great deal of K . . . and found him very pleasant and unaffected ; he showed me over his flat and I could see no trace of luxury or display in it ; his wife, to whom he introduced me, is charming and as unaffected as he . . . ”

“ Which one ? ”

“ What do you mean—which one ? His wife I say.”



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“ Oh, I see, the lawful one . . . You don't seem to know that he's got three. And two other apartments, not to mention special privileges for staying in the country. And three cars—you only saw the plainest—the one used by the legal ménage . . . ”

“ Is it possible ? ”

“ Not only possible. It is true.”

“ But how can the Party tolerate it ? How can Stalin . . . ”

“ Oh, come ! Don't be so naïve. The men Stalin fears are the pure, are the clean.”



## LETTERS AND COMMUNICATIONS

*To the assistant Federal Secretary of the Friends of  
the Soviet Union at Nice,*

*December 28th, 1937.*

DEAR SIR AND COMRADE,

I am very grateful to you for sending me the papers. I had been promised a copy of Pierre Alessandri's lecture at Nice, but had not so far received it. I have now read it with very great interest, but with no surprise. Neither the arguments nor the figures are new to me. I find it as difficult to dispute these figures as to accept them without misgivings. I should be glad to think they were invariably correct, and with all my heart I wish Pierre Alessandri was right. This puts me in an awkward position for arguing with him. I am grateful to him for grasping that in spite of all I am still a friend of the U.S.S.R., and that my disillusion is cruelly painful. Yes, I wish I could be mistaken in the distressing things which I observed and was forced to recognise



as facts, and which agreed only too well with Sir Walter Citrine's own remarks.

I can safely leave to his competence the discussion of all the amazing statistics which Pierre Alessandri accepts without verification. Citrine too admires the effort and many of the results ; he too acknowledges that, given the internal and external circumstances, the U.S.S.R. could not perhaps have achieved more, but he is greatly distressed that the goal should still be so far off, and curses the monstrous exaggerations of a propaganda of bluff and lies. "You suppress statistics where it suits you," he says to his unfortunate guide, who really can do nothing about it, "and it is impossible to find out, except by very careful examination, what the situation is here. Yet you give the impression to delegations of visitors that your people live in conditions far superior to other countries," etc. etc.\*

Pierre Alessandri's criticisms are extremely courteous, and his obvious good faith encourages me to tell him that I was perhaps rather more aware of things, rather better informed than I dared let it appear in my book (for the gravest reasons). In the first place, I did not travel alone, and of my five companions, all

\* *I Search for Truth in Russia.*



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of whom were as enthusiastic as myself at the start (only two of these left me at the end of the first month), two spoke Russian very well, and a third had just spent six months living and working in Moscow, during which time he had been able to see and understand a considerable amount. Without them and their personal investigations which constantly corroborated mine (and in particular without the perspicacity of the one who had just spent six months in the country) I should no doubt have noticed hardly anything of what lies hidden under re-assuring appearances, and I should have returned from the U.S.S.R. quite ready to join in the chorus of praise with Alessandri. On the other hand, I cannot believe that Alessandri, with the perfect good faith that transpires in all his statements, would not have reached the point where I am now, if he had seen, heard and discovered all the things that I saw and understood. The few examples I felt I might give as illustrations were far from being isolated and exceptional, as Alessandri wishes to make out; I only quoted them because they were typical and representative. I could have quoted many others. The fear of compromising the very people who had given me the best inform-



## AFTERTHOUGHTS ON THE U.S.S.R.

ation, prevented me from referring to it.

However unsatisfactory and even deplorable the state of affairs may be in the U.S.S.R., I should have kept silent if only I could have felt sure that an advance was being made towards better things. It is because the sad conviction has been borne in upon me that the Soviet Union is descending the slope we had hoped to see it climb and is abandoning, one after the other (always, I admit for excellent, or at any rate, specious, reasons), all the advantages the great revolution had struggled so hard to obtain, it is because I am appalled to see it drag the French Communist Party in its wake towards irreparable errors—that I considered it my duty to speak.

If you know Pierre Alessandri, tell him how much I am obliged to him for the perfect courtesy of his criticisms. Once more, I wish he were right.

\* \* \*

Cuverville, *December 10th, 1936.*

MY DEAR X . . .

Last year I spent ten days in the Borinage,\* going down the pits and mixing with the

\* Mining district in Belgium. (Translator's note.)



## AFTERTHOUGHTS ON THE U.S.S.R.

workmen, particularly the unemployed. The poverty and wretchedness of your Lille comrades could not be greater than theirs. Faith in the U.S.S.R. will not make that poverty less frightful. At least, it sustains them, you will say, with the consolations of hope. But, in that case, the hope of life everlasting and the compensations of the next world would be even more satisfactory.

I laid too much stress in my book on the loss of "intellectual values." When a people is dying of hunger and cold, those are not the first things one tries to save. And indeed, I should have consented to see those values compromised for a long time to come, if only the material condition of the people had been better assured. But in the U.S.S.R. both the former and the latter are in process of being lost. That is what is so horrible.

It is horrible to see so many advantages, so laboriously acquired by the revolution, being abandoned one after the other. It is high time that our eyes should be opened to this abominable shipwreck in which all our hopes are in danger of sinking. It is essential not to be dragged along blindly. At the rate at which the Soviet Union is moving, everything that we most condemn in the capitalist régime



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will shortly be restored. The differences in salaries are increasing, social classes are being re-formed, the bureaucracy is triumphant. Once more, I could consent to see thought in the Soviet Union as little free as it is in Germany or Italy, if at least the well-being of the masses were assured ; but we are still too far from the mark. I am told that the present state of things must be accepted, for the evil is only temporary ; the Soviet Union has only paused for a moment as it makes its way up. But the Soviet Union is not making its way up but down ; and soon there will be needed a new October. It is time to cry a halt, to utter a warning.

\* \* \*

Paris, *January 5th, 1937.*

Gentlemen,

Your joint letter\* does not, alas, surprise

\* Paris, December 23rd, 1936.

YOUTH CLUB OF THE SEVENTH ARRONDISSEMENT  
LEAGUE OF COMMUNIST YOUTH.

*To Monsieur André Gide.*

Sir,

After having carefully read your new book *Back from the U.S.S.R.*, after having weighed the various arguments and so-called proofs that it contains, we wish to express



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me, but it contains a serious insult which I cannot let pass.

What! has it not occurred to a single one of you to put in the scales against the "big commercial deal" you speak of, the tremendous advantages, the golden fleece, that the U.S.S.R. offered me with all the accompaniments of fame?

What! When you offered me the presidency of your group, did you know me so ill as not to realise that such considerations could not affect me?

If I had consented to tell lies with the rest, then indeed you would have had the right to speak of a "big commercial deal," but then you would not have dreamt of suspecting my

---

our indignation and the profound disgust we feel at your insidious attacks against the U.S.S.R.

At a time when it is more than ever necessary to defend the Soviet Union, we note with positive loathing your recantation and the praise meted out to you by the fascist press.

We had hoped for a moment that you would contradict the words spoken at the Youth Meeting at Magic City on November 18th, by Comrade Ribard; unfortunately, no such contradiction has been forthcoming and we therefore conclude that your book is nothing but a big commercial deal.

We now consider you unworthy to be our Honorary President.

We thank you for the help you have given us for eight months and beg to remain

Yours, etc.



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sincerity. When I see you so thoughtlessly take up such absurd accusations, I am less astonished at the ease with which you let yourselves be hoodwinked about all the rest.

As your letter is written by hand and you may not have it in duplicate, I am returning you a typescript copy, and I appeal to your honesty to read it out publicly to any of your comrades who may not as yet be acquainted with it, and at the same time this answer of mine. I cannot help thinking that there must be some sensible comrades among you who will consent to open their eyes and see things as they are. As I do not doubt that your confidence in me will some day return, and with increased esteem,

I remain as before

Your devoted

A. G.

\* \* \*

Monsieur Pierre Scize fulminates against me in an article, greatly resembling those in which Henri Béraud\* once upon a time annihilated me.

\* A French fascist journalist. (Translator's note.)



I do not attach great importance to this kind of attack, so I should have let this one pass had not some errors of fact crept into it which I must correct.

Monsieur Scize relates at the beginning of his diatribe two little stories, "gospel truth," says he, which just show the sort of man I am. Here is the first :

Pierre Louys, my constant companion at the beginning of our careers, made an appointment to meet me in the Place Saint-Sulpice. It was in winter. The weather was dreadful. For more than half an hour I waited by the fountain in the rain, while Louys, comfortably seated behind glass doors, amused himself watching me cool my heels.

Monsieur Scize relates this tale correctly and his narrative coincides with mine (*Si le Grain ne Meurt . . .* Chap. VII). But, without turning a hair, he simply inverts the rôles ; he attributes to me the part of the secret watcher, to Louys that of the poor victim—in defiance of all likelihood and all psychology. But I refuse to call this the act of a cad as Monsieur Scize does ; it was only, and I could only think it, one of the numerous *canulars*\*

\* A practical joke in the slang of the Ecole Normale, the great Paris college where young men are trained to be university professors. (Translator's note.)



which Pierre Louys in those days excelled in getting up in order to see just how much he could make me swallow. No, Monsieur Scize, believe me, Pierre Louys was not a cad.

Here is the second "gospel truth" :

Emile Verhaeren and his friend, Willy Schlobach, the Belgian painter, went out to dine in the neighbourhood of Brussels with the architect, Octave Van Rysselberghe, the brother of the painter. Verhaeren had taken charge of the tickets. On their way back, Verhaeren, when he came to look for the tickets to show at the barrier, could find only one and exclaimed : " Good gracious, Willy, I've lost your *coupon* ! " \*

This "mot," which Monsieur Scize saddles *me* with, and in which he perceives the mark of the most sordid egoism, delighted all Verhaeren's friends and became famous. Verhaeren himself indeed was the first to laugh at it and enjoyed telling the story. But anyone who was acquainted with Verhaeren would know how far his generosity exceeded his egoism, and how innocently spontaneous that naïve egoism always was. No, Monsieur Scize, believe me—

\* Belgian word for ticket. A Frenchman would say " billet." (Translator's note.)



there was nothing mean about Verhaeren.

Monsieur Scize must allow me to think that the portrait he draws of me with the help of these false attributions is not very like. He is hardly more scrupulous in the rest of his article, and this permits him to be all the more vehement. When he gets to the ground of "morals," he fairly kicks up his heels. It was to be expected. On my return from the Congo, Bonardi\* too could think of nothing better. But in this case the responsibility is mine; I myself supplied the weapons. And the only thing I deplore is that the baseness of these attacks may for ever intimidate frankness in the republic of letters. Monsieur Scize is all for Stalin's method—that of scaring truth. He must allow me to tell him, however, that here again and in his very insults he commits a gross blunder. But, as he has the honour of telling us, he doesn't care a damn for that. I am glad to think that some of his readers may care rather more.

When we consider this weakness in the upper story, this incapacity to examine facts, or this lack of honesty (I leave the choice to him) it becomes less amazing to see him applaud the

\* French fascist journalist. (Translator's note.)



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sentences in the sinister Moscow trials. Monsieur Pierre Scize claims that he doesn't "stick at trifles"—and he proves it.

\* \* \*

February 17th, 1937.

MY DEAR GUEHENNO,\*

Here are a few notes I jotted down on reading André Wurmser's† letter addressed to you in *l'Humanité* of February 13th.

Wurmser, at the beginning of this letter, quotes a sentence from your article, *La Mort Inutile*, which you wrote on the occasion of the last Moscow trial: "It is not our business to be either Stalinists or Trotskyist; these questions are specifically Russian." Allow me to say that I entirely disagree with you. You too, as well as other people, will be obliged sooner or later to make your choice. But I maintain that it is possible not to approve Stalin without for that reason instantly becoming a Trotskyist.

Wurmser quotes immediately after this a sentence taken from *Back from the U.S.S.R.* :

\* French left-wing writer and journalist (Translator's note.)

† French communist journalist. (Translator's note.)



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“The particular errors of a country cannot suffice to compromise a cause which is international and universal.” I wrote this sentence, not at all against the revolutionary cause but, on the contrary, in order to safeguard the interests of this cause when Stalin’s U.S.S.R. is abandoning them—as I think is proved more and more every day ; and as all people of good faith who refuse to be blinded any longer will soon have to admit. I think (it is necessary to insist upon this) that it is extremely dangerous at the present time to link the cause of the Revolution to the Soviet Union which, I repeat, is compromising it.

Trotsky, for having denounced this compromising policy, is declared to be a public enemy, whereas he is only the enemy of Stalin’s compromises, and is thus identified with fascism—which is really a bit too simple. He is far more the enemy of fascism than is Stalin himself, and it is as a revolutionary and anti-fascist that he denounces Stalin’s compromises. But just try to make a deluded people grasp this !

I cannot approve either of the following sentence of yours : “It seems impossible to question the guilt of the accused, of the



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condemned . . . These men are guilty." If that had really been proved, however horrified I might be, I should say that Stalin is quite right to execute them. But the real value of all these confessions still seems to me extremely problematical. I must ask you to give your attention to the following letter from Kléber Legay about the engineers and technicians who were accused of sabotage in the mines that they directed at Kemerovo in Siberia, and who were condemned. They too *confessed* and accused themselves, in spite of all the evidence of the workmen employed under them, and of all the technicians who had been sent to conduct an expert enquiry on the spot.

The evil lies so deep that one hesitates to recognise it. The fruit's magnificent appearance is deceptive. There is a worm in it.

*January 29th, 1937.*

To Magdeleine Paz.

I have read with great interest and excitement your writings in defence of the men condemned by the Moscow tribunals, and in particular of those who are now being tried, for the following reasons :

I have just returned from Russia, as you



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know, and during the course of our enquiry we had conversations with several persons who are very well informed as to this trial.\*

Among the accused at the present trial are two men whom we heard spoken of during our stay in Russia.

They are the two assistant-commissars† for heavy industry and agriculture.

On November 23rd, in the morning, our interpreter, Comrade Smerling, came into our railway compartment, and said to us :

“French comrades, I am going to read you the indictment published in the *Pravda*, which has been drawn up against certain engineers and technicians who are accused of sabotage in the mines they are directing at Kemerovo in Siberia.

“They are accused of having, during the years 1935-1936 proceeded to accumulate fire-damp in the pits under their management, and of having kept them in a permanently explosive state during that period.”

He added that all the accused had admitted their crime during the course of their examination, had mutually accused each other and had furthermore said that they had been in

\* The Radek-Piatakov trial. (Translator's note.)

† Piatakov and Maralov. (Translator's note.)



contact, as regards these activities, with the two assistant People's Commissars.

The next morning, on arriving at Schakty, we heard to our stupefaction that eight of the accused had been condemned to death.

There were five of us—Vigne, secretary of the National Federation of French Miners ; Sinot, Secretary of the Miners of Carmaux ; Planque, miners' delegate at Vermesles (Pas de Calais) and Quinet, a communist deputy, who all listened to the interpreter Smerling reading aloud, and to his subsequent explanations.

I can still see and hear my comrade Vigne, indignantly crying to Smerling, "It's pretty queer how all your accused not only admit their guilt, but mutually accuse each other of the most incredible things !"

We did not believe and we never shall believe in these accusations, as we told Smerling, and this is why :

We had been assured by the responsible trade-union officials that there existed an entire department for the inspection of safety in mines whose methods were very strict. This worked as follows :

(1) An engineer appointed by the People's Commissar ;



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(2) The local and branch presidents of the trade-unions, who are workers chosen by the workers themselves ;

(3) Pit delegates and section delegates, also chosen by the workers.

These delegates, we were told, have got full powers. They can stop either a whole mine, or a section of a mine, or any work above ground, if they consider there is any danger, or even a threat of danger.

We positively cannot understand how, with such machinery for inspection engaged in safeguarding mines, it can be possible for engineers to carry on, quite undisturbed, preparations for such crimes, especially over a period of several years.

Being myself a miner, and having a perfect knowledge of the difficulties of mining, for I have worked at it myself for thirty years, of which I spent twelve as workers' delegate for the safety of miners, in one of the mines of France most subject to fire-damp, I defy any technician, however competent he may be, to organise systematically the placing of a mine in a permanently explosive state, without the delegates, however idiotic they might be, instantly noticing it.

If the inspectors of safeguards in the mines



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at Kemerovo did not notice it, then they are either accessories, or such an inspectorate does not exist at all.

If it exists, it is even more guilty than the other accused, and as it is the fashion in Moscow to shoot people, these are the people who ought to be shot first.

If it does not exist, we have been lied to about the protection of workers against dangers. In that case, what can one think of men in power who deceive even their guests on such serious matters?

And even if no inspectorate of safeguarding in mines exists, I persist in saying that it is impossible to maintain a mine in a permanently explosive state without its being noticed.

The management, the supervisors, the thousands of workers employed in these mines would have seen and grasped what was going on.

Can we conceive that all these people, knowing their lives to be in danger, would have kept silent simply in order to be able to establish with greater certainty the proofs of the accused's guilt, when at any moment they might all have perished if such things were actually the case?

No, technically, in the opinion of all, it is



not possible to keep a mine in a permanently explosive state through the accumulation of fire-damp.

Anyone, however little acquainted he might be with mining problems, would exclaim like us—"Nothing will make us believe that such a thing is possible."

Another thing disturbs us: according to Smerling, the director of the Kemerovo Trust had already been tried on the same charges in 1928, during the famous trial of the 53 engineers, 11 of whom were condemned to death.

Once before, on that occasion he had been pardoned and then, though it was known that he was capable of voluntarily endangering the lives of thousands of people, the Soviet government put him back at the head of the mining trust! What can be thought of such things?

He begins again at Kemerovo, once more with Stickling, the German engineer, and is once more pardoned. Is it possible?

It makes one shudder to think that such things should be possible, and one wonders what such a sinister farce can mean.

I wanted to tell you this after having read what you have written about the various political trials that have taken place in the



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U.S.S.R. and also I want to say how right you are to protest and to go on protesting in the interests of truth.

Let there be independent lawyers at each of these political trials in order to defend the unfortunate people who are accused and shot without public opinion being really aware of the reasons.

You have my leave to make use of this letter to support your efforts on behalf of the comrades who are tried and condemned to be shot for reasons that do not carry weight.

If you doubt my information, you can refer to my travelling companions, Vigne, Sinot and Planque, who will certainly confirm what I have written above.

I do not mention the fifth, for he can do nothing to annoy his Moscow idols—those who are masters to-day, but will perhaps be shot to-morrow.

For who knows, with things going at this pace, whether the best builders of the Russian Revolution are not going to exterminate each other, one after the other?

I beg to remain, comrade, with my best trade-unionist regards,

KLEBER LEGAY.

*(Assistant Secretary of the National Federation of Miners.)*



*Statement by Kléber Legay (Eclaireur du Pas-de-Calais, reproduced in the Temps, December 20th, 1936.)*

I have already said that the kind of work performed by women in Russia does not seem to me at all like socialism as we desire it in France. I defy anyone to deny that such work is performed by Russian women.

But it seems that it is I who am lying and libelling the Russian Revolution.

Having been challenged at Carvin, in spite of my first refusal, to say what I had seen, I said, word for word, what follows :

“The present condition of the Russian workers, compared with what it was before the war, is a great advance.”

I said that the methods of work in Russian mines, of which I quoted two examples, with, I may add, favourable comments, would not, however, be accepted by our miners, simply because our methods are far better. Upon which I am again accused of libelling the Russian Revolution, and of lying in a flagrant manner. These are sad times when people call true statements rascally behaviour, and falsehood is glorified by the same men. From various places in the coalfields, communist comrades have protested against the truths I



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have told. Is it by order? I must frankly admit that I am beginning to suspect it, and that it does not surprise me in the least, for in certain places people have not forgotten that I occupy a responsible post in the trade-union organisation.

Yes, something good has been done in Russia ; yes, the state of the working-class has improved ; yes, a sort of socialism in the Russian style is being constructed ; but the French workers, as regards their working conditions, their safety, their daily lives, their freedom and their culture are not below the Russians, but on the contrary above them—I may even say *far* above them.

\* \* \*

Dr. A. DENIER, *Le Clos*, La Tour du Pin  
(Isère)

*December 4th, 1936.*

Sir,

I was in Moscow on the day of Gorki's funeral. I heard your speech and it grieved me, for I knew you to be a sincere man and I feared you would merely be duped during your whole stay. I have just read *Back from the U.S.S.R.* and I breathe again. I went to



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Russia to do some research work on certain problems of biological physics ; I lived freely with my colleagues, without any officials or interpreters coming between us ; I lived with them intimately—and I suffered. You have admirably expressed it ; the nonconformist is excluded from life ; all my colleagues—those of them, that is, who have any guts—shut up in their own breasts any desire they might have to think or write ; a permanent constraint weighs on their very gestures ; those of my friends who have liberal opinions—some of them are practitioners, others well-known professors—are obliged to have two personalities ; the surface one that is seen, that speaks, that expresses itself outwardly ; and the other, that they hide deep down and only reveal after days of intimacy.

Yours respectfully,

A. DENIER.

*Extract from a paper read in October, 1936 to  
the Faculty of Medicine, Paris.*

Who can be a doctor in the U.S.S.R. ? Workers, if they follow lectures at the Institute after their day's work is over, or else students who are paid 110 roubles a month. They are lodged in dormitories of 10 to 15.



Their remuneration is increased or decreased according to how they pass their examinations. When they leave the Faculty, they are sent to country districts to take the place of an assistant doctor or a hospital assistant. There are about 100,000 doctors at present ; we are told that about 400,000 are needed.

Up till two years ago, doctors were paid 110 roubles a month, which is so inadequate that some doctors have qualified as technical workers who get far higher pay. It was difficult to get recruits, and women predominated. It was then discovered that, though a doctor does not actually produce anything for the plan, he is necessary to the State ; and his salary was raised to 400 roubles. Then the standard of studies, which had formerly been that required from assistant doctors, was also raised.

. . . All doctors who ended their studies in the years 1930-33 are insufficiently trained ; they are obliged to come back to the Faculty for six months' supplementary courses.

. . . These hours of work seem satisfactory, but what I have just said about this is merely theoretical ; for those who work only six hours



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are rare. Usually, as the salary is only 400 roubles, which is not enough to live upon, a doctor takes two or three other jobs to enable him to earn 800 to 1,200 roubles, for we must keep in mind the purchasing power of the rouble. A very indifferent suit of clothes costs 800 roubles ; good shoes 200 to 300 ; a pound of bread 90 kopeks ; a yard of woollen material 100 roubles ; moreover, up till 1936 a month's salary was compulsorily taken by the State in loans ; the sole room in which the doctor lives with his family has to serve as dining-room, bedroom, library, kitchen, etc., and costs 50 roubles a month. He is lucky if he has no children.

Material conditions are hard for our colleagues, but what is most odious is the moral constraint. A doctor must take into consideration the hall-porter, who is a member of the G.P.U. ; he cannot speak his mind to his collaborator at the hospital, and the maxim which used to be posted up in France during the War, "Be careful ! Hold your tongues ! Enemy ears are listening !" now hits the nail on the head in Russia.

. . . A certain eminent colleague of ours, a



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member of the Academy of Sciences, has just spent two years in prison ; foreigners were told he was ill. Another has been deprived of his chair and his laboratories for having emitted a scientific opinion which did not coincide with communist theories, and was forced to sign a public letter retracting it, like Galileo, in order to avoid deportation. Why, when I knew he was there, was I unable to see a certain colleague of liberal opinions whom I ought to have met? My telegram only reached him a month after I had left ; and when I went to see him, I was told he was away, although in fact he was there.

\* \* \*

Paris, 29th November, 1936.

Sir,

When I saw you for a moment at Sochi, I very much feared that you would be deceived and that party spirit—that most terrible enemy of progress—would make you praise the new state, so that *Back from the U.S.S.R.* gave me real pleasure.

Knowing the Russian language well, having seen with my own eyes, heard with my own ears all you saw and heard, I entirely subscribe



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to what you say and am grateful to you for having dared to say it.

In token of my very humble thanks, please allow me to send you some notes I took in Russia.

God grant that our France may be able to trace out her new road with steadiness and wisdom.

Yours respectfully,  
X . . .

For the third time, after an interval of three years, I have come back from Russia.

The régime, overwhelmed as it was at first by the lowest dregs and their brutality, allowed art, culture and sensibility to be trampled on.

It is the modern form of the barbarian invasions.

Twenty years after the revolution there are still 2nd and 3rd class railway carriages. On the latest built big Russian steamer the proportion of passengers is 75 per cent 3rd class, 20 per cent 2nd class and 5 per cent 1st class. The same holds good for food, clothes and hotels. Those who can pay get the best places.

A workman works forty hours in five days



out of six. There are five holidays a year, and a workman officially works 400 hours more than a French workman, who has a forty hour week. But salaries are so low that he frequently does a day and a half or two days' work in one day, working from 12 to 16 hours in two different places.

Piece-work is more common than ever. A capable man earns more than his fellow-worker who envies him because of his greater skill.

When work is lacking, the worker is unemployed and without a wage. The State is not hampered by sentiment ; when it has work to be done, it gives it to the worker who does it best and quickest ; when there is no more work, it leaves the worker to fend for himself and find another occupation in order not to starve.

Meanness and envy are still the same everywhere ; the conscientious and intelligent worker who is called an "udarnik" manages to earn more than his fellows, and his holidays with pay sometimes last a month instead of a fortnight.

Hard work is generally encouraged and rewarded, but favouritism has not lost its rights, and much humble merit, if removed from the eyes of the central powers, remains completely unrecognised.



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Some people who are crafty, ambitious, very clever or well-connected, manage to obtain highly privileged posts. Salaries vary between 150 and 5,000 roubles a month. Some earn much less and some much more.

At sixty-five, a worker who has spent 25 years at manual labour, gets a pension of 37 roubles a month.

Those who have not managed to save up and who do not want to be supported by their children, all go on working ; these are the majority.

During the period of reconstruction an activity comparable to what we experienced after the war was created ; but activity, especially in Russia, does not necessarily mean comfort or wealth.

People work overtime almost everywhere, for all goods are incredibly expensive.

As for the gang foremen and under foremen, they receive orders that a given piece of work must be finished within a specified time. If their workers or employees do not make the requisite effort, they themselves have to provide the extra labour and work 18 hours if necessary, for they are responsible for the conduct of the men and the results obtained.

This is not always easy, and their situation is sometimes a very difficult one with the



central powers on the one hand and the negligence of the worker on the other.

After three preliminary warnings, any worker can be dismissed from one day to the next, without compensation or notice.

In one factory that I visited, there was a streamer warning the workers that from September 1st, all those who failed to produce the requisite number of pieces would be dismissed without appeal.

For his extra amount of work a gang foreman or under foreman does not get extra pay as a certainty. He may, however, hope to have his holidays doubled and to receive some sort of bonus. This often happens, but it is not compulsory for the State, and often depends on a mere whim.

When the State is in financial difficulties, it increases taxes, which are collected directly without possibility of fraud by cutting wages at the source, or else it makes a forced loan which is collected in the same way.

In order to cover general expenses, it increases the price of goods. A yard of the commonest silk costs 165 francs. And nobody dares complain of the wastefulness and profiteering of the State as shopkeeper.

On August 8th, a new levy on all salaries



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was decreed in order to come to the help of the Spaniards in their struggle against fascism. The State has the right to do this. Nobody can say a word, and the hole it makes in individual budgets is of no importance.

In exchange, the State creates schools, factories, hospitals, child welfare centres, sanatoria and holiday homes for some workers which are outwardly admirable, but where everybody lives in dormitories. It vigorously represses theft and crime by the application of the death sentence or banishment, seeks to bring about an improvement of morals, encourages maternity, suppresses prostitution everywhere, spreads education in hitherto unknown proportions, and 80 per cent of the population now wears shoes or slippers, whereas in Tsarist Russia 80 per cent went barefoot.

The liberty of the press, however, is completely abolished. Criminal proceedings, as far as breaches of common law are concerned, are not reported. The trial of a political crime on the other hand, sometimes occupies the whole Press for days and days, and public opinion is shaped with the greatest skill.

The smallest feat of their great men—aviators, scientists or politicians sometimes



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occupies the newspapers for weeks. A kind of hypnosis reigns and Stalin is their God.

Are the advantages obtained by the masses great enough to excuse the sanguinary ploughing up of the 1917 Revolution? And, in spite of the immense progress that has been accomplished, and the splendid efforts that are everywhere apparent, what real levelling has resulted?

Already new differences have everywhere replaced the old. They will replace them more and more uninterruptedly, and as surely as one wave replaces another.

I do not give ten years for all the old social differences to have once more re-appeared.

\* \* \*

*December 2nd, 1936.*

Dear Monsieur Gide,

I have just finished reading *Back from the U.S.S.R.* Ever since I too came back from that country, which I left when I was still under the impression which the recent reprisals for Kirov's assassination in December 1934, had made on my mind, I devour any fresh accounts I can find of Soviet Russia. Now, as I read your book, after having read a few



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weeks ago Victor Serge's letter to you and Ignazio Silone's letter to Moscow, I feel happy, though sorrowful too. I feel happy because your book has confirmed me in the fundamental belief that forms the basis of what for me is the meaning of life—namely, that there can only be one truth. I am a former militant communist and Soviet official ; I worked for more than three years in the U.S.S.R., at the press, at the propaganda apparatus, in the inspectorate of industrial enterprises, and, after a bitter inward struggle, after the most violent conflicts of my life, I have come to the same conclusion as you, who have come from another country, from other surroundings. With us there is Serge, there is Silone, there is all that part of humanity which does not accept the conformism your books speak of.

Perhaps my writings on the U.S.S.R. might interest you. I am sending you by this post my little book *Die Wiederentdeckung Europas* and a pamphlet *Der Moskauer Prozess*. I am also asking my publishers, the Schweitzer Spiegel Verlag at Zurich, to send you my big book *Abschied von Sowjetrussland* which came out a year ago.

Before I end my letter, allow me to refer to a question which never stops troubling me. At the end of your book you speak of the



danger that the cause may be held responsible for all that is deplorable in the U.S.S.R. ; this danger seems to me immense—immense because Soviet propaganda has not got the courage you demand of it to cease playing on words (page 62) and to acknowledge that “the revolutionary spirit is no longer wanted.” But, as long as this attitude is absent, innumerable sincere revolutionaries will continue to identify the U.S.S.R. with socialism, and Stalin’s policy with the foundations of a juster social order. And this error—need I say it?—will paralyse, will annihilate the best forces of human progress. What can be done to help avert such a tragic consequence?

I do not know your attitude on the recent Zinoviev-Kamenev trial, on the mass executions on the thousands of “counter-revolutionaries” in the concentration camps of the White Sea, of Siberia and of Turkestan. There, together with their Russian comrades, foreigners are also to be found, members of the Schutzbund who, two years ago, fought on the barricades of Ottakring for a better future ; there are to be found those who once lay in the cells of the Peter-Paul fortress below the level of the Neva. In a Soviet prison too lies Zenzi Mühsam, widow (what a significant and tragic



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coincidence !) of a man who, on his side, met his death in one of Hitler's concentration camps. There too are to be found, already dead perhaps, or perhaps still living corpses, numbers, not only of my friends but of revolutionaries well known to communist socialists and to the friends of progress in every land.

But public opinion, "human conscience" no longer seems to exist. What a feeble echo the Novosibirsk trial—that tragic repetition of the Moscow trial—has had in the world ! Yet six human beings were shot, after a trial that lasted two days, without independent witnesses, with the "regulation confessions" as sole and ludicrous "justification."

It is no longer possible to save the dead. But it is possible to prevent other people dying in the same way. It is possible to restore to life those who, on the shores of the Arctic Ocean, in the immense tundras of Siberia, in the G.P.U. cellars of the famous Liubianka prison are still breathing.

I am struggling with all my strength. But my strength is limited. My appeals only reach a restricted number of people. They cannot succeed in breaking down prison walls.

But *you* are well known. And those who are committing, in the name of the greatest of all



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human ideas, such tragic injustice, will not dare to go against an appeal that comes from you.

Ossietsky, Hitler's victim, has been set free.

Help us to free Stalin's victims !

Please let me shake your hand.

A. RUDOLF.

\* \* \*

*Thursday, November 5th, 1936.*

Sir,

I have just read your words in *Vendredi* with emotion and gratitude and I take the liberty of writing to tell you so. You have earned the gratitude of those men for whom the revolution means first and foremost social justice and the dignity of all human brings. I know how difficult it is for writers who enter what is for them that unknown land of the revolution, to have courage enough to go on seeing the truth, and when they have seen it, to have courage enough to express it openly. But I know too that the "desire to remain constant to oneself" is never really satisfied save by complete sincerity. And what is harmful to the workers' cause is never that sincerity, Monsieur Gide, but hedging, sparing, and compounding.



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I have just re-read those words of yours, and I reflect that now you no doubt realise what those men have gone through who defended the October Revolution from the first, who hailed it as the sequel of their struggle against the war, who gave it all they could give it of themselves, and who have seen it (not merely in the last few months, but ever since Lenin's death) suffer the contamination of the old world and, for the sake of enduring, compromise what is perhaps its real *raison d'être*.

Believe me, Sir, with respectful admiration,  
MARCEL MARTINET.

\* \* \*

Paris, *November 25th, 1936.*

As to whether the time is opportune for criticism to be directed against the U.S.S.R., I reply *yes*.

It is necessary to examine, and if needful, to criticise the Russian revolutionary experiment, as Lenin himself asked communists of other countries to do. But when should this be done? A communist cannot refuse to examine realities, for that would be the negation of Marxism. Communists, precisely because they represent the future of the working-class



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movement, have not the right, on the pretext of not discouraging the proletariat, to conceal from it the errors of a revolutionary experiment. On the contrary, their duty, their task is to examine the path followed by the Russian Revolution. This is particularly the case in France, where the political maturity of the working-class enables it to understand that mistakes should be made but not that it should be deceived. Such an examination will prove that socialism has not been realised in the U.S.S.R. but it will also show that the *struggles*, the *conquests* and the revolutionary *conditions* of the U.S.S.R. are valuable lessons and encouragements for the proletariat in its future struggles. Far from playing into the hands of the bourgeoisie, such an attitude continues to enlighten proletarian consciousness, and to fortify the revolutionary character of its struggle by dissipating dangerous illusions and guarding against exaggerated optimism.

In comparison with that of other countries, the Soviet Union's economy represents an enormous advance, but we must not lose sight of the fact that it contains *capitalist germs*, such as the open market and the inequality of salaries with all their consequences.

J. SEN.























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